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Muḥammad Khalīfah Ḥasan Aḥmad Khalīfah

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To my Parents

for their Love and Understanding

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Wisdom consists in knowing things as they are in their real, observable character, not as someone would desire or like them to be.

--*Saadia,* *Kitāb al 'Amānāt wa al Iᶜtiqādāt,* *p. 199.*

As justice is a quality liked and coveted for its own self, for its intrinsic beauty, the same applies to truthfulness, except perhaps in the case of such people as never tasted how sweet it is, or know the truth, but deliberately shun it. . . . A liar will avoid the path of justice; he will, as matter of preference, side with oppression and false witness, breach of confidence, fraudulent appropriation of the wealth of others, theft, and all the vices which serve to ruin the world and mankind. That man only is praiseworthy who shrinks from a lie and always adheres to the truth, enjoying credit even among liars, not to mention others.

--*Al Biruni,* *Ta'rīkh al Hind,* *pp. 4-5.*

TRANSLITERATION

The following system of transliteration is used for Arabic words:

A*	T**	A*	T**
ا	'	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	c
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	هـ	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ى	y

The short vowels are represented by:

a for the fatḥah

i for the kasrah

u for the ḍammah

The long vowels are represented by:

ā for the 'alif

ī for the yā'

ū for the wāw

The final *hā'* is represented by *ah* at the end of the word, *at* when in construct.

ABSTRACT

The history of the study of the history of religions, as a discipline, is far from complete; only the contribution of the West is known to its modern students. Unaware of developments elsewhere, they have regarded the discipline as an unprecedented creation of nineteenth century Western scholars.

The objective of this study is to initiate the writing of the history of the medieval study of religion. Its goal is to introduce the contribution of medieval Jewish and Muslim scholars: to show that they confronted problems similar to those of modern scholars, and to show that the methodology they established anticipated some of the recent advances in the discipline, including the phenomenological analysis of religious knowledge and the investigation into the various dimensions of religious life and experience.

Fully understanding the inadequacy of previous methods of studying religion(s), the medieval scholars looked for new means and methods. They recognized the necessity of dwelling among the people whose religion was to be examined, of learning their language and following their customs, in order to achieve a personal eidetic intuition of the essence of their religious experience. This was done with unprecedented sympathy and understanding, motivated by a rigorous quest for scientific truth viewed as a divine, as well as ethical, command. The problems of the old methods and the emergence of the new methodology are vividly discussed by al Birūnī, the chief writer

on the religions of India, and by Ibn Kammūna, whose two comparative works, on the monotheistic religions and on the Jewish sects of the Rabbinites and the Karaites, are unswervingly objective. This thesis provides a brief account of the scientific methodology applied by these two authors.

The main theme of this study, however, is a detailed examination of the methodology which the Jewish thinker Saadia al Fayyūmī used in his work Al 'Amānāt wa al 'I[c]tiqādāt, and that which the Muslim author Muḥammad al Shahrastānī used in his work Al Milal wa al Niḥal. Saadia, viewing the problem of religion as essentially a problem of epistemology, based his inquiry into the process of religious knowledge on his critical investigation into the general process of cognition. This included a critique of natural thinking, the use of methodological doubt, the suspension of judgment, the discovery of the pure soul and the process of "dropping from the mind," or phenomenological reduction. This phenomenological structure of Saadia's theory of cognition anticipated the modern phenomenological assumption of the unity of the sciences and the unity of the method applicable to them.

Al Shahrastānī developed a definition of religion based on its social function. This study included an analysis of the nature of religious experience and the stages of religious commitment. He also analyzed the phenomenon of sects, seeing it as a repeated historical pattern, a necessary part of the development of any religion. The multiplicity of religions and sects required the development of a scientific method of classification. Al Shahrastānī developed a series of classifications, proceeding from the most general among religious

phenomena to the most specific. He reduced the multiplicity to essential structures which reveal the relationships between different religions and sects and make an intelligible system of their multiplicity.

The initiation of the writing of the medieval study of religion will, we hope, bring about a deeper understanding of the medieval literature in the field of religion. It will, no doubt, fill a serious gap in the history of the study of religion(s) and, hopefully, it will provide a legitimate place for the medieval heritage in the study of religion within the discipline of Religionswissenschaft.

GENERAL OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

The medieval study of religion has long been viewed by many modern scholars as non-objective and as non-scientifically founded. Medieval scholars were generally thought to be theologically and philosophically oriented and many of their works were conceived as the product of politically and apologetically motivated scholars.

This judgment, however, resulted from a lack of familiarity with the medieval literature on the subject. This unfamiliarity is two-sided. First, historians of the medieval period took these works exclusively as sources for medieval philosophy and theology. Being untrained in the modern discipline of Religionswissenschaft, they limited the use of these works to the theological and philosophical disciplines and disregarded completely the analysis that we today would call phenomenology of religion.

On the other hand, these medieval works were either unnoticed or totally misunderstood by modern phenomenologists and historians of religion, despite the fact that a good number of these works had already been translated into several European languages. Modern scholars of Religionswissenschaft wrongly thought the medieval works were apologetic works whose epistemological focus is normative metaphysics.

The purpose of this dissertation is to correct these misconceptions about the medieval study of religion, uncover their true

foundation and formulate a reassessment of these works based on their essential character. In addition, this essay intends to initiate the writing of the history of the study of religion in the Middle Ages as derived from its basic sources. This task will involve the development of the methodology of the medieval study of religion, providing an analysis of its major issues and their significance for the modern scene. By doing so, we hope to bring about a deeper appreciation of the medieval heritage to the study of religion and fill a real gap in the writing of the history of the study of religion.

PART I

THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

INTRODUCTION

The history of religions as an academic discipline is generally believed to be the creation of 19th century scholars. As the title of this section indicates, this study departs from this general view and proposes an earlier age for the origin and development of the discipline. Indeed, to regard the 19th century revival of the discipline as the creation of a new science with no real connection with the study of religion(s) in the past is a completely erroneous view, resulting from the failure to be acquainted with the Medieval Islamic and Jewish literature on the subject of religion(s). It is the purpose of this section to correct this view and to show the relationship between the medieval and modern contributions to this discipline. We shall see the continuity in the tradition of the history of religions and see the discipline as a united field of research with common themes of study, common problems and objectives.

I

THE ATTITUDE OF MODERN HISTORIANS OF RELIGIONS TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Modern historians of religions have altogether ignored the medieval study of religion. They think the study of religion in the medieval period was so controlled by theology and philosophy that it lacked all the qualities of scientific research. Thus, Kitagawa states:

> During the Middle Ages three monotheistic religions -- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam -- existed side by side in the Mediterranean area. The relationship among them was amazingly amiable in certain areas, and Christians, Jews, and Muslims had ample opportunities to "compare" their religions with others and ask serious questions. Indeed, some of them did ask fundamental questions, but their questions and answers were dealt with theologically and philosophically, not "scientifically" in the sense of *Religionswissenschaft*. This "scientific" temper in the study of religions developed only at the dawn of the modern period, namely, during the Enlightenment.[1]

Wach shows that sociological factors controlled the study of religions in early periods, including the Middle Ages. According to him, various cultures and communities "were aware of and showed interest in religious studies and institutions differing from their own. In most cultures this interest remained pragmatic, while in some it developed into a systematic study of the religious concepts and practices

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[1]Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions in America," in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, p. 16.

of other peoples and groups, as among the Greeks, the Romans, the Hindus, the Moslems, the Buddhists and the Confucians."[1]

However, Wach's analysis implies that none of the reasons for such interest was scientific. Instead he explains the existence of this interest in sociological terms:

> We find such interest arising on three different sociological levels: as the concern of rulers faced with the task of integrating peoples of different religious persuasions into a politically unified realm; as that of the theologian in defending his faith against one or many competing cults and in buttressing the intellectual and moral presuppositions upon which his own faith rests; and, finally, as an interest among the rank and file of the people as a result of local contiguity. However, syncretistic practice and theological concern are two different things, though the former may be conducive to a development of the latter.[2]

Although Wach does not discuss or even judge the scientific characteristics of the study of religions among the peoples and cultures he enumerates, his concentration upon sociological reasons implies that a scientific interest was not an important motive for this early awareness of other religions. By such reasoning, sociological motives could also be found for the modern interest in the study of religion. In neither case would they, alone, indicate how scientific the discipline is.

Another critique of the medieval study of religions has been launched by Charles Long who distinguishes two periods in the study of history of religions. The rationalistic (which also means scientific) period started with the Enlightenment; the non-rationalistic

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[1]Joachim Wach, Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 5th impression, 1972), p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 3.

(non-scientific) period preceded the Enlightenment and included the Middle Ages. In his criticism of I.R. al Fārūqī's portrayal of the history of the discipline of the history of religions, Long maintains that al Fārūqī

> . . . presupposes that the history of this discipline was carried out along lines which were quite rational. Such was not the case. The history of religions is a child of the enlightenment. This is to recognize that the history of religions had its beginnings in a period in which the Western World was seeking some rational (as over against a religious) understanding of the history of man's religious life. The history of religions during the enlightenment was for the most part rationalistically and moralistically oriented.[1]

Before the Enlightenment, Long maintains that

> . . . the understanding of religion from a religious point of view yielded even less on the level of scientific understanding, for while the medieval theologians were able to see Islam, for example, as a religion and not as an instance of a truncation of reason, it was nevertheless relegated to the level of paganism since it did not meet the standard of the one true revelation. The rationalistic interpretation of history had the value of establishing a criterion other than revelation as the basis of religion. This meant that to a greater degree the data of the non-Christian religions could be taken a bit more seriously.[2]

It can be said here that Long and al Fārūqī treat the development of the history of religions from two completely different perspectives; this may explain why both of them are right in their interpretation, considering the perspective which each represents. Long's analysis is right insofar as it treats the development of the discipline in the West, contrasting post-enlightenment to pre-enlightenment, one

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[1]Charles H. Long's remarks appear in footnote to I.R. al Fārūqī, "History of Religions: Its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim-Christian Dialogue," in Numen, Vol. XXII, Fasc. 1 (January 1965), p. 35.

[2]Ibid., p. 35.

rational and scientific, the other non-rational and non-scientific; but al Fārūqī has in mind the development of the discipline in the East (that is the Muslim-Jewish East). Since its initiation among the Muslims and the Jews, the discipline of the history of religions developed along rational and scientific lines like all the sciences based on logic and mathematics which emerged at that time.

The study of mythology in the Middle Ages draws the attention of Jan de Vries. He ascribes the failure of the Medieval authors in describing myths accurately to their complete reliance on authority which prevented them from freely investigating the subject. As he puts it, "The picture we must present of the mythological 'studies' in the medieval period is not encouraging. One might conclude that no more could be expected of an epoch that relied on every authority and resisted all free investigation."[1] Elsewhere, de Vries states: "The Medieval approaches to myth are quite different from those of the Enlightenment, but whatever the approach used, the result was unsatisfactory in all respects. Consequently, we cannot really speak of 'history of religions' until the end of the eighteenth century."[2]

Finally, Eliade, in his historical survey of the study of the history of religions, mentions most of the important works of Muslims and Jews on the subject of religions. He notes that:

> Islam had . . . produced important works on the subject of Pagan religions. Al Birūnī (973-1048) had given a remarkable description of Indian religions and philosophies; Shahrastānī (d. 1153) was the author of a treatise on the Islamic schools;

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[1]Jan de Vries, The Study of Religion: A Historical Approach, p. 23.

[2]Ibid., p. 219.

> Ibn Hazm (994-1064) had compiled a voluminous and erudite *Book of Decisive Solutions concerning Religions, Sects, and Schools*, in which he discussed Mazdean and Manichaean dualism, Brahmans, Jews, Christians, atheists, and several Islamic sects. But it was especially Averroes (ibn Rushd, 1126-1198) who, after profoundly influencing Islamic thinking, was destined to give the first impulse to a whole intellectual trend in the West. In interpreting religion, Averroes employed the symbolical and allegorical method. He concluded that all the monotheistic religions were true, but he shared Aristotle's opinion that, in an eternal world, religions appear and disappear again and again.[1]

Eliade also notes the contributions of medieval Jews:

> Among the Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages, two demand particular mention: Saadia (892-942), in his *Book of Beliefs and Convictions* (c. 933), expounded the religions of the Brahmans, the Christians and the Muslims in the framework of a religious philosophy. Maimonides (1135-1204) undertook a comparative study of religions, scrupulously avoiding the syncretistic position. He attempted to explain the imperfections of the first revealed religion, Judaism, by the doctrine of divine condescension and human progress, theses that had also been advanced by the Fathers of the Church.[2]

However, when Eliade seeks justifications for the medieval interest in the study of religions, he maintains that Western interest in foreign religions "was awakened during the Middle Ages by the threatening presence of Islam."[3]

In general, modern historians of religions judge the medieval achievements in the study of religions as non-objective: theologically and philosophically oriented and therefore not based on a scientific method. Certain factors have played an important role in the shaping of this judgment.

An important factor is the modern misunderstanding of the nature

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[1]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1959), pp. 225-226.

[2]Ibid., p. 226.

[3]Ibid., p. 225.

of theology and philosophy in the medieval period; since their modern counterparts are held to be limited and dogmatic, medieval theology and philosophy must have been equally restricted. Another factor is the stereotyping of the Medieval period as the period of conflict between revelation (theology) and reason (philosophy). Religion, the real subject of the conflict, was absorbed in the conflict, to be manifested only in rituals and religious practices, while its interpretation, theological or philosophical, flourished. Religion was reduced to one of the two interpretations, and the "religious" category as a subject for intellectual and academic discussion almost disappeared in favor of theological and philosophical approaches.

Another widespread fallacy among modern historians of religions is that, whenever the medieval study of religion is based on a solid scientific foundation, its motives and objectives are not. The medieval works are usually explained as the product of politically and apologetically motivated scholars; and, despite the accuracy of their descriptions, their ends are understood as basically non-objective. Unless these misunderstandings are clarified, the medieval contribution to the study of religion will remain obscure.

II

THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCIENCE OF RELIGION

From ancient times, Jews were interested in the study of religion; the investigation of the Scriptures was the first duty of the scribe. Intellectual curiosity about the origin and authorship of the Hebrew Scriptures motivated the majority of the scholars of the Talmud. The scientific, rational analysis of religious data began as early as Philo of Alexandria (born about 30 B.C.). And with the historian Flavius Josephus in the first century A.D. we have the first study of Jewish sects.

Among Muslims, the Qur'ān contained the first scriptural critique of the texts of the Holy Writings. This textual criticism was responsible for the Qur'ānic classification of religions into religions with scriptures, religions without scriptures, and religions with pseudo-scriptures. Islām was put in the same category as Judaism and Christianity, and the three religions were projected back in history to an original purely monotheistic form of religion called the "Ḥanīf" religion; the German term *Urmonotheism* might be the best expression for this. The Qur'ān also defines an older form of belief named dīn al fiṭrah, best translated as *religio naturalis*.

The classic Islamic criticism of religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, produced a goodly number of volumes which are rightly

designated as polemical. Responses from Jewish, Christian and other scholars produced works with the same polemical motives. The scientific value of these works was certainly affected by this apologetic purpose, and they were completely ruled by theological presuppositions. Despite this shortcoming, these works involved an overwhelming amount of research on the origin, history, and development of these religions. Similarly thorough research was produced regarding the various Islamic sects and their comparison to the Orthodox trend. In order to bring about a clearer understanding of Islām, a thorough investigation was made of the religious, cultural, economic, political, linguistic, historical and social context surrounding the advent of Islām in pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as the earlier situation of the different peoples which constituted the Islamic empire. This period represents the first stage in the study of religion and has furnished the general background for the genesis of this study.

The second stage was the objective, non-apologetic interest in the study of religion, which might be defined theoretically as the period of the philosophical interpretation of religion. The general concept of religion had by that time been radically changed by its contact with philosophy, which provoked a scientific study of religion. Rational analysis of religion became the distinction of the age. The theological acceptance of the truth of religion was suspended by philosophy until it could be proved by rational argument. This was the first <u>epôché</u> ever applied to the study of religion. From this point the study of religion emerged; and what came to be known as the conflict between philosophy and religion, reason and revelation, was no

more than a manifestation of the fact that religion could be understood through other channels of intellectual endeavor. Books were compiled to reconcile he two systems of thoughts, and, finally, the philosophical interpretation of religion was accepted and appreciated as another way of looking at religion. In fact, it was in the philosophical explanation of religion that medieval philosophy was most original. And the same needs which brought about the development of the Muslim philosophy of religion produced its Jewish counterpart. The great majority of Jewish medieval thinkers made the philosophic interpretation of Judaism their main concern and dealt with problems of metaphysics in a religio-philosophic context. Both Jewish and Muslim scholars crossed the boundary line from theology to the philosophy of religion, thus opening the first chapter in the academic study of religion.

The rise of medieval science played an important role in the development of the science of religion. The direct impact of medieval science upon the study of religion is seen in the fact that, for the first time, "religion itself was made an object of theoretical inquiry, and the rich variety of its manifestations became a matter of scientific description and classification."[1]

When the scientific spirit extended to the field of religion, scientific objectivity became one of its most remarkable characteristics. According to Julius Guttmann, this scientific spirit, or what he calls the "emancipation from naive faith in authority," appears

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[1]Julius Guttmann, Philosophies of Judaism (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 59.

vividly in "the friendly discussions concerning religion held in Baghdad between members of various religions."[1] One of the Spanish theologians who visited Baghdad in the tenth century describes the nature of these discussions as follows: "At the first meeting there were present not only people of various Islamic sects, but also unbelievers, Magians, materialists, atheists, Jews and Christians. . . . Each group had its own leader, whose task it was to defend its views, and every time one of the leaders entered the room, his followers rose to their feet and remained standing until he took his seat. In the meanwhile, the hall had become overcrowded with people." The purpose of the meeting is stated as follows: "We are meeting here for a discussion. Its conditions are known to all. You, Muslims, are not allowed to argue from your books and prophetic traditions since we deny both. Everybody, therefore, has to limit himself to rational arguments." The reporter, who was not pleased by what he saw in such discussions, concluded his personal report by stating: ". . . after these words I decided to withdraw. They proposed to me that I should attend another meeting in a different hall, but I found the same calamity there."[2]

The atmosphere of these discussions as it is described in this report was completely scientific, and as Guttmann comments, "any dogmatic appeal to authority was ruled out"; the human intellect was

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[1]Guttmann, p. 59.

[2]Quoted by Alexander Altmann from Journal Asiatique (1852), p. 93, in "Saadya Gaon: Book of Doctrines and Beliefs," pp. 13-14, ed. A. Altmann, in Three Jewish Philosophers (New York: Meridian Books, 1960).

taken as the only source and "criterion of religious truth."[1] The scientific discussion of religion involved materialists, religious rationalists "who were known for their denial of all positive revelation,"[2] and, above all, relativists who claimed the "equal value of the various faiths."[3] The critical attitude towards religion as such was "independent of philosophy" or any other discipline. According to Guttmann, "historic and dogmatic differences between religions were regarded as of secondary importance, as compared to their common ethical and religious values and principles."[4] The contact and conflict between all these elements had resulted in the development of a scientific approach to the study of religion. Guttmann, again, describes this development as follows:

> The clash of the great religions and discord between the sects severely shook the naive faith in religious authority. Within the ever-widening religious horizon, the rival religions were all seen on one level, and the opposing claims to exclusive truth seemed to cancel one another. Symptomatic of this mode of thought is the development in Islamic literature of the interest in comparative religion.[5]

The Muslim scholar al Mas^cūdī, according to von Grunebaum, made a clear distinction between two groups of writers on the Zoroastrian religion: those "who set out to refute Zoroastrian doctrines and such who merely

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[1]Guttmann, pp. 59-60.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 60.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 60.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 60.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 59.

wish to discuss them."[1] For von Grunebaum, this distinction made by al Mas^cūdī "proves the existence of 'comparative religion' more than half a century before al Baghdādī (died 429=1037)."[2] Al Mas^cūdī listed "no less than sixteen authors who had dealt with this subject."[3] The earliest work on religious history in Persia is considered by von Grunebaum to be Bayān al Adyān written in 1092 by Abu al Ma^cālī Muḥammad.[4]

The final stage in the theoretical development of the study of religion is represented by works from the medieval period in which the phenomenon of religion(s) was treated as a sui generis category and not as an offshoot of theological and philosophical speculation. What characterized this stage was an awareness that previous works on religion(s) failed to provide an accurate, objective description of religion as a phenomenon on its own terms without reducing it to theological or philosophical principles. Also, it was felt necessary to explain the multidimensional aspects of religion(s) and so, for the first time, social, cultural and psychological interpretations were introduced as essential tools for a total understanding of religion and religions. Another important feature in this stage was its strong empirical approach. The most celebrated scholars of this stage were Saadia Gaon (882-942), al Birūnī (973-1048), Ibn Ḥazm (994-1065),

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[1]Gustave E. von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam: A Vital Study of Islam at Its Zenith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 7th impression, 1969), p. 337.

[2]Ibid., p. 337.

[3]Ibid., p. 337.

[4]Ibid., p. 337.

al Shahrastānī (d. 1153) and Ibn Kammūna (1215-1285).

The voluminous contributions of the medieval period to the study of religion(s) established this study as an independent science for the first time. According to M.A. Drāz, two principal features distinguished this science from previous studies of religion. First, this study became for the first time "empirical and descriptive, independent of all other sciences and arts, comprehending all the then known religions."[1] Religion had previously been studied either as one of the general aspects of life or as a part of psychological, philosophical or dialectical studies. At other times, the study of religions was limited to the "positive religions."[2]

The second feature of the science of religion in the medieval period was its scientific character. The scholars of religion "did not depend upon imagination and speculation or upon information which wavers between truth and falsity or upon the habits and fables of the uneducated classes of the people which might deviate to a lesser or greater extent from the reality of the religions they described."[3] Instead, they "derived their description from trustworthy and original sources and so they developed it into an independent science, they gave it a sound scientific method. . . . They have the credit of establishing it as an independent science, ten centuries before modern Europe did the same."[4] It is also significant to indicate that all

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[1]Muhammad ᶜAbd-u-Allah Drāz, Al Dīn: Buhūth Mumahhidah li-Dirāsat Tārīkh al Adyān (Kuwait: Dār al Qalam, 1970), p. 21.

[2]Ibid., p. 21.

[3]Ibid., p. 21.

[4]Ibid., pp. 21-22.

the scholars of this last stage were trained in the languages of the religions they studied.

The heritage of the Middle Ages in the study of religions is voluminous and cannot be presented in a single volume. Therefore, this survey will have to be limited to few authors. In the following pages, a brief account of the methods of al Birūnī and Ibn Kammūna will be given as models of two different scientific approaches to the study of religion. A complete discussion of the methodologies of Saadia al Fayyūmī and Muḥammad al Shahrastānī will constitute the main theme of this thesis.

1. Al Birūnī and the Empirical Study of the Religions of India

A. Jeffery begins his article on "Al Birūnī's Contribution to Comparative Religion" by the following statement:

> If comparative religion means the study of religion by the same scientific method as is used in Comparative Anatomy or Comparative Philology, viz. the assembling of facts about the beliefs, and practices of various religious groups, arranging them, classifying them, comparing them with one another and with the beliefs and practices of one's own religion, in order to arrive at a better understanding of the significance of religion, then this branch of study had already had a long history in the area of al Birūnī's life work.[1]

Abū Raiḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al Birūnī is, without doubt, the most eminent student of comparative religions in the medieval world. His objectivity and the scientific methodology of his work on Indian religions surpassed all others. His application of the scientific method to the study of religion(s) demonstrates the unity of the scientific

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[1]Al Birūnī Commemoration Volume A.H. 362-A.H. 1362 (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1951), p. 125.

method despite differences in the subject matter to which this method might be applied. His advantage was that, being an eminent scientist, he was at home with science; as a result, his work on religion may be considered as an empirical work of the first calibre. A modern scholar describes this work as follows:

> Written in the eleventh century, it remains one of the most penetrating accounts we have of Indian society. Not for over eight hundred years would any other writer examine India with such thoroughness and understanding, and even in modern times, with all the information now available and with all the new techniques of research, no one has produced a book at once so objective, so learned, and so compassionate. It is also unique as an historical document, for nothing else from the period remotely touches it in accuracy of observation and breadth of coverage of Hindu society.[1]

In the introduction to his work on Indian religions, al Birūnī developed the methodology which he applied with success to the study of Indian society. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the literature about India, which he attacked as follows: "everything which exists on this subject in our literature is second-hand information which one has copied from the other, a farrago of materials never sifted by the sieve of critical examination."[2] His general approach to the study of Indian religions is described by Edward Sachau: "In general it is the method of our author not to speak himself, but to let the Hindus speak, giving extensive quotations from their classical authors."[3] He held that the best method is to study Indian religions

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[1]Ainslie T. Embree in the introduction to his abridged edition of Alberuni's India, tr. Edward C. Sachau (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971).

[2]Edward C. Sachau, ed., Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India, with notes and indices by Edward C. Sachau (Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1964), p. 6.

[3]Ibid., p. xxiv.

from within, applying a strict scientific, objective method which does not permit any external element to influence the student of religion. Empirical research by direct contact between subject and object through observation is the only approach which secures for the student of religion an accurate description of the object of study. Al Birūnī explains this as follows:

> No one will deny that in questions of historic authenticity hearsay does not equal eye-witness; for in the latter the eye of the observer apprehends the substance of that which is observed, both in the time when and in the place where it exists, whilst hearsay has its peculiar drawbacks.[1]

The description of what appears, when it appears and where it appears exemplifies a phenomenological description with a historical awareness which, when combined together, make the ideal study of religions. Arthur Upham Pope elaborates this concern by maintaining that:

> While Alberuni faithfully holds to facts and is specific and careful in his descriptions, he always understands that both history and science have to go beyond fact and that understanding does not emerge from an inventory but from interpretation that is only possible by general principles. Moreover, he must use other techniques than the mere recital of fact. He shows a real interest in the meaning and derivation of words where they can throw light on any problem. He understands that history was far more than a series of events and that any true history had to be history of ideas and institutions. Accordingly, he must give detailed and penetrating accounts of religion in India, and any account of Indian religions without an understanding of the philosophies involved would have been hopelessly superficial.[2]

For al Birūnī, history is a dynamic movement; therefore, to describe a phenomenon at a particular moment in history is not to give

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 3.

[2]Al Birūnī Commemoration Volume, pp. 281-282.

us a whole picture of that phenomenon. A description of a certain phenomenon should consider its conditions in the past, the present and in the future. This means for al Birūnī that while "eye-witness" is essential for the accurate description of the phenomenon, it must nevertheless be viewed within the light of the whole history of that phenomenon. "Eye-witness" alone limits the phenomenon within its historical moment, permitting only a partial description. This is pointed out by al Birūnī in the following manner: "the object of eye-witness can only be actual momentary existence, whilst hearsay comprehends alike the present, the past, and the future, so as to apply in a certain sense both to that which is and to that which is not (i.e., which either has ceased to exist or has not yet come into existence)."[1]

Through this analysis, al Birūnī reaches the conclusion that the most favorable study of religion is that which considers it as a tradition, whether oral or written. If "an author has the right method, he will do his utmost to deduce the tenets of a sect from their legendary lore, things which people tell him."[2] Further, written tradition is among the most important sources for the study of religions. According to al Birūnī, "written tradition is one of the species of hearsay -- we might also say, the most preferable. How could we know the history of nations but for the everlasting monuments of the pen?"[3]

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 6.

[3]Ibid., p. 3.

For al Birūnī, the observer or the historian who reports or describes a certain phenomenon or event is the one who is to be deemed responsible for the accuracy of what is described. As he explains:

> The tradition regarding an event which in itself does not contradict either logical or physical laws will invariably depend for its character as true or false upon the character of the reporters, who are influenced by the divergency of interests and all kinds of animosities and antipathies between the various nations.[1]

It is not only obligatory but it shows "moral courage"[2] to present other systems of belief, whether religions or philosophies, without distortion. Al Birūnī attacks the tendency among certain authors to present a false description of what they study. Accordingly he states that

> . . . the same method [misrepresentation of theories] is much in fashion among those who undertake the task of giving an account of religious and philosophical systems from which they slightly differ or to which they are entirely opposed. Such misrepresentation is easily detected in a report about dogmas comprehended within the frame of one single religion, because they are closely related and blended with each other.[3]

These distortions in description are difficult to detect in other religions as al Birūnī indicates: "On the other hand, you would have great difficulty in detecting it in a report about entirely foreign systems of thought totally differing both in principle and details, for such a research is rather an out-of-the-way one, and there are few means of arriving at a thorough comprehension of it."[4] This tendency,

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 5.

[3]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[4]Ibid., p. 6.

al Birūnī maintains, "prevails throughout our whole literature on philosophical and religious sects,"[1] and he holds that it results from the lack of scholarship, the use of unscientific methods, the lack of moral courage to speak the truth, and above all, from the ignorance of that truth.

According to al Birūnī, the study of religion is divided between two camps of scholars, one of which is not objective enough to follow the rules of the scientific method. The status of the study of religion between these two camps is described as follows:

> If such an author is not alive to the requirements of a strictly scientific method, he will procure some superficial information which will satisfy neither the adherents of the doctrine in question nor those who really know it. In such a case, if he be an honest character he will simply retract and feel ashamed; but if he be so base as not to give due honor to truth, he will persist in litigous wrangling for his own original standing-point.[2]

Of the second camp of scholars he states: "If, on the contrary, an author has the right method, he will do his utmost to deduce the tenets of a sect from their legendary lore, things which people tell him, pleasant enough to listen to, but which he would never dream of taking for true or believing."[3]

This understanding of the nature of the study of religion requires the student of religion to be capable of distinguishing accurate descriptions from distorted ones. The literature is full of both kinds of reports, and the student of religion will have to be especially

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 6.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 6.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 6.

trained in the scientific method for sifting his documents and classifying his data. One way to fulfill this task is by distinguishing "different classes of reporters."[1] This may be done through the keen analysis of reports in order to discover in them the elements which are clearly added by the reporter for his own purposes. This involves a psychological analysis of the character of the reporter and the motives in his mind while he was reporting his findings. The impact of Ḥadīth criticism and the analysis of the personality of al rāwī, the narrator, is quite obvious. Al Birūnī extends the rules distinguishing the trustworthy narrator to be applied to the study of religion in order to distinguish good historians of religions from others.

Al Birūnī distinguishes five classes of reporters. The first gives a false report "intending to further an interest of his own, either by lauding his family or nation, because he is one of them, or by attacking the family or nation on the opposite side, thinking that thereby he can gain his ends. In both cases he acts from motives of objectionable cupidity and animosity."[2] In a related category comes the reporter who may present an erroneous description of certain people or events if he happens to be under certain obligations or emotional ties which affect his account of the described phenomena. According to al Birūnī, a reporter may tell "a lie regarding a class of people whom he hates because something disagreeable has happened between them. Such a reporter . . . acts from motives of personal predilection

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 4.

and enmity."[1]

Another reporter may lie "because he is of such a base nature as to aim thereby at some profit, or because he is such a coward as to be afraid of telling the truth."[2] Closely related to this is the reporter whose nature "is to lie and he cannot do otherwise, which proceeds from the essential meanness of his character and the depravity of his innermost being."[3] The last kind of reporter is the one who "tells a lie from ignorance, blindly following others who told him."[4]

In a tradition which is full of such reporters, the student of religion must establish which was the first to describe the phenomenon. This process is described as follows:

> If, now, reporters of this kind become so numerous as to represent a certain body of tradition, or if in the course of time they even come to form a consecutive series of communities or nations, both the first reporter and his followers form the connecting links between the hearer and the inventor of the lie; and if the connecting links are eliminated, there remains the originator of the story, one of the various kinds of liars we have enumerated, as the only person with whom we have to deal.[5]

The use of the term "liar" is significant because it classifies a false description as a moral crime. No matter what form the misrepresentation takes, it all comes down to one offense -- describing something as what it is not. Al Birūnī equates truthfulness with

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 4.

[2]Ibid., p. 4.

[3]Ibid., p. 4.

[4]Ibid., p. 4.

[5]Ibid., p. 4.

justice, as he states:

> . . . as justice (i.e., being just) is a quality liked and coveted for its own self, for its own intrinsic beauty, the same applies to truthfulness. . . . A liar will avoid the path of justice; he will, as a matter of preference, side with oppression and false witness, breach of confidence, fraudulent appropriation of the wealth of others, theft, and all the vices which serve to ruin the world and mankind.[1]

To describe something falsely is not a scientific error but a moral one. To tell the truth about a thing or an event is a divine command and a matter of "moral courage."[2] The historian of religions' commitment to his own belief should not stand in the way of truth or prevent him from accurately describing a religion other than his own with categories that are relevant to it. This, al Birūnī makes very clear in his statement:

> I have . . . written this book on the doctrines of the Hindus, never making any unfounded imputations against those, our religious antagonists, and at the same time not considering it inconsistent with my duties as a Muslim to quote their own words at full length when I thought they would contribute to elucidate a subject.[3]

This should be the case even if the Muslim reader dislikes what is described. Accurate reporting must not be affected by the emotional motives which might influence the reader. Al Birūnī explains this in the following manner: "If the contents of these quotations happen to be utterly heathenish, and the followers of the truth, i.e., the Muslims, find them objectionable, we can only say that such is the

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 5.

[2]Ibid., pp. 4-5. Interestingly enough, al Birūnī supports this argument by quoting the Qur'ān (Sura 4:134), and the New Testament (Matt. X.18, 19, 28 and Luke XII.4).

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

belief of the Hindus, and that they themselves are best qualified to defend it."[1]

To make his method clear, especially in the minds of the Muslims of his day, al Birūnī states, "This book is not a polemical one. I shall not produce the arguments of our antagonists in order to refute such of them as I believe to be in the wrong. My book is nothing but a simple historic record of facts. I shall place before the reader the theories of the Hindus exactly as they are."[2]

2. Ibn Kammūna and the Comparative Study of the Monotheistic Religions

Another Medieval author who works from a definite methodology and a clear understanding of the task of the historian of religions is Sa^cd Ibn Manṣūr Ibn Kammūna. His works on comparative religions include a comparative study of Judaism, Christianity and Islām[3] and a comparative treatise on the differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites.[4]

As the title Tanqīḥ al abhāth shows, the work is intended to

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[1]Sachau, Alberuni's India, p. 7.

[2]Ibid., p. 7.

[3]Tanqīh al-abhāṯ lil-milal al-ṯalāṯ, first edited by Moshe Perlmann and published by the University of California Press, 1967; translated by the editor under the English title: Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths: A Thirteenth Century Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

[4]The Arabic text is edited by Leon Nemoy. See Ibn Kammūnah's Treatise on the Differences Between the Rabbanites and the Karaites (American Academy for Jewish Research), Proceedings, Vol. XXXVI, 1968; translated into English by Leon Nemoy in Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. LXIII, No. 2 (October, 1972), and No. 3 (January, 1973).

correct misconceptions about the three monotheistic religions. The book provides a description of the three religions which is based completely upon sources and arguments derived solely from the scriptures and tradition of each religion. Ibn Kammūna states his methodology for the study of these religions as follows:

> Recent discussions have induced me to compose this tract as a critical inquiry into the three faiths, that is, Judaism, Christianity, and Islām. I have prefaced it with a general survey of prophethood, followed by a discussion of these religions in chronological order. Thus I began with the oldest, that is, Judaism, proceeded to the intermediate, Christianity, and concluded with the youngest, Islām.[1]

Of his sources and the objective method he followed in the composition of the book, Ibn Kammūna declares that, for each of these religions, he has cited

> . . . the fundamentals of its creed, without going into the particulars, as it would have been impossible to treat them all. I have followed this with an exposition of the arguments of the adherents of each faith for supporting the true prophethood of the respective founder of each. In addition, I have adduced the objections commonly raised and their rebuttals, and have drawn attention to the main issues, distinguishing the valid points from the invalid.[2]

In pursuing this kind of study, Ibn Kammūna emphasizes, "I have not been swayed by mere personal inclination, nor have I ventured to show preference for one faith over the other, but have pursued the investigation of each faith to its fullest extent."[3] These claims were indeed fulfilled, as Moshe Perlmann indicates: "Rarely does the author himself come to the fore, and when he does it is to act as moderator

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[1] Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths, p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] Ibid., p. 11.

and to point out the logical acceptibility or weakness of an argument adduced."[1]

In his discussion of the three religions, Ibn Kammūna made use of sociological and psychological interpretations, especially in his analysis of the phenomenon of prophecy. Here he emphasized the charismatic personality of the prophet and analyzed the social role and also the social needs which led to the emergence of prophets and their prophetic claims. To prove the existence of the personality of the prophet and to explain its ultimate meaning, Ibn Kammūna employs sociological terms:

> We say that man is distinguished from other living beings by the fact that he cannot enjoy a good life as long as he is left to himself in the conduct of his affairs, and is without the cooperation of others of his species in obtaining the necessities of life, so that, for example, one acts as greengrocer, another as baker, another as tailor, another as needlemaker.[2]

This sort of division of labor and the cooperation which results from it "is impossible without mutual contact, which must have some pattern and just measure."[3] "Mutual contact" is also impossible without leadership. According to Ibn Kammūna, "This presupposes someone who sets the pattern and the just measure, and it must be a human being who addresses men and makes them adhere to what he has set. If men were left to their own views there would be discord."[4] The existence of

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[1] Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 28.

[3] Ibid., p. 28.

[4] Ibid., p. 28. Even non-rational beings need such organization. Ibn Kammūna states, "Every nation we know at present has one person or

such a person is necessary for the welfare of mankind,[1] and it is the quality of dependence which makes his existence a necessity. As Ibn Kammūna explains, "If that which depends on the existence of the prophet exists, then certainly he must exist."[2]

The social character of man leads to the emergence of the prophet as an organizer and legislator. As Ibn Kammūna explains: "Man is by nature social, and interdependence may give rise to rivalry, which may lead to lethal fighting. A law must be imposed by a legislator, that is, the prophet."[3] According to Ibn Kammūna, "in every genus are species, one of which is perfect. The same relationship exists between the species and the family, between the family and the individual, and between the individual and the links."[4] This organic unity is to be found with man:

> Similarly, man must have a chief. The chief must either rule only the outward aspect, which is [done by] the ruler (sulṭān), or only the inward aspect, which is [done by] the learned ('ālim), or must rule both, and that is [done by] the prophet or by him who occupies the prophet's place in his time or after him.[5]

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more for whom prophethood is claimed, except people of outlying regions and the like who resemble nonrational beings, yet whose economy and society are integrated under some form of governance." Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths, p. 38.

[1]Ibid., p. 28. However the welfare of mankind "is not sufficient to confirm the existence of a prophet. For this benefit is present when a man is believed by reason of his magic or the power of suggestion to be a prophet, even if he is no prophet at all, as we find it in the social structure in many pagan polities. Rather, additional merits must be present." Ibid., p. 29.

[2]Ibid., p. 29.

[3]Ibid., p. 32.

[4]Ibid., p. 33.

[5]Ibid., p. 33.

For Ibn Kammūna, the prophet as organizer and legislator is a bearer of charisma which is necessary for the fulfillment of his role as a prophet. Thus, he states:

> It is evident that this man, the legislator (founder of religion), should be distinguished in some way from all other men, or else he would be no different from any other person; acceptance of his instruction would not be more binding than the acceptance of any other tenets, and discord would disrupt legislation itself. What distinguishes him are the miracles, announced by him, and proving the certainty of his mission.[1]

Ibn Kammūna's sociological analysis includes a discussion of the impact of social groups of different denominations on religious understanding. It is an analysis of the Jewish community within Islamic society and the kind of religious understanding possible between the two groups. His theory is that the status of a certain group of people within a certain society affects its understanding of other groups. Accordingly, Ibn Kammūna explains that "the contact of a minority with a majority affects the majority and the minority differently."[2] An example of this is given as follows: "when a linguistic minority is in contact with a linguistic majority, the minority learns the language of the majority whilst the majority does not learn the language of the minority, or, at best, learns it much later."[3] When different groups happen to live in one society, the majority usually does not find it necessary to know the creeds of the minority. Thus, for example, "the contact of Muslims with Jews does not necessitate a Muslim inquiry into

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[1] Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths, p. 29.

[2] Ibid., p. 77.

[3] Ibid., p. 77.

what the Jews assert."[1] Also a knowledge by the minority of the majority's language does not necessarily mean that the same concern is given to the majority's religion. Thus,

> . . . despite numerous contacts of the bulk of Jews with the Muslims, many Jews still do not know the basic Islamic tenets known by the rank and file Muslims, let alone the elite. It is even more natural that a similar situation should obtain on the Muslim side, or, at the very least, that both sides should be equal [in mutual ignorance].[2]

This phenomenon is also true of Christian knowledge of the Jewish religion despite the fact that Christians have read the Jewish books.

The comparative method is considered essential for the understanding of religion. In some way, religions explain each other, and thus comparison is beneficial for the interpretation of religions. Of special importance, old systems of belief are very helpful in explaining modern religions. Ibn Kammūna tends to explain some religious ritualistic observances in Judaism by contrasting them to another "older form of worship." He thus maintains that "the motivation of much of what seems irrational in Mosaic legislation becomes clear only to him who knows the faith, cult, and specific rites of the Ṣabians and of the other idol-worshippers."[3] The emergence of a developing religion is thus seen by Ibn Kammūna as proceeding historically from a certain source; the new form of belief may continue the old form, giving it a different emphasis, or it may totally repudiate the older form or source. The relationships between Judaism,

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[1] Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths, p. 77.

[2] Ibid., p. 77.

[3] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

Christianity and Islām are of the first kind, while the relationship of Judaism to the religion of the Ṣabeans seems to be of the second kind. However, relationship to the source does not change the essence of worship itself. According to Ibn Kammūna, "Submission to God is enjoined upon man in the other faiths." Ibn Kammūna even considers idol-worship to be a "kind of worship." According to him, "The idolators do not believe idols create heaven and earth; no sensible person does. But they do feel that idol worship brings one closer to God."[1]

In his strict objectivity, Ibn Kammūna calls for an understanding of religions which proceeds from the nature of the religions themselves. Forms of beliefs which seem irrational or repulsive to us seem so because we are accustomed to certain religions but not to others; in our ignorance, we compare unfamiliar beliefs with our own. This comparison is not sound because the two forms of beliefs belong to two different systems. Ibn Kammūna mentions and corrects some of the general misunderstandings about certain systems of beliefs in the following manner:

> The Zoroastrians do not postulate that there are two deities struggling for supremacy. They teach, rather, that God is one, and that there is a good force, Yazdān, and an evil force, Ahrimān. Among the Zoroastrians, the Manichaeans and Daisanites teach that those forces are light and darkness. Their permissiveness about marriage with sisters and daughters is not a rationally inadmissible practice; the prohibition of such marriages is one point of the revealed precepts, and this kind of marriage has become disreputable among us because most religions known to us forbid it. The worship of idols is in existence to this day among the Chinese, Turks, Indians, and others.[2]

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[1] Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths, p. 148.

[2] Ibid., pp. 147-148.

Ibn Kammūna's work on the differences between the Rabbanites and the Karaites is of special significance. It can be safely described as the first objective work on the two sects. Leon Nemoy states in his English introduction to the Arabic text that

> In the history of Karaism and Rabbanite-Karaite polemics in particular the treatise occupies a unique place, for it is the only known attempt to examine the differences between the two sides in a calm logical fashion, free from the blinders imposed by the polemical necessity to defend one side and condemn the other.[1]

Ibn Kammūna sees his task as a historian of religions as correcting and objectively answering the charges brought by the scholars of one religion or sect against another. The titles given to the chapters of his treatise clearly indicate his aims. The title of his second chapter reads: "Reporting a portion of the charges brought by the Karaites against the Sages, together with the answers refuting these as well as other charges of theirs of similar nature."[2] The same is to be done in reverse and thus his title to the third chapter reads: "Treating the charges brought by the Rabbanites against the Karaites together with the replies which the latter might make thereto."[3] As Ibn Kammūna declares in the beginnings of these chapters, his aim is "to remove the condemnation," _'izālat al tashnī^c_, which both sects ascribe to each other. He thus states:

Be it known unto you, (O reader) that with the answers (given)

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[1]Leon Nemoy, _Ibn Kammūna's Treatise on the Differences Between the Rabbanites and the Karaites_ (American Academy for Jewish Research), p. 108.

[2]Leon Nemoy, "Ibn Kammūna's Treatise," _Jewish Quarterly Review_, p. 115.

[3]_Ibid._, p. 232.

> here I do not aim to declare one view true and the other false. My intention is merely to remove the condemnation of the Sages by showing that their teaching does not run counter to the dictates of (legitimate) judgment. The Karaites have in fact gone to such extremes in reviling the Sages, condemning them, and heaping ridicule upon their sayings that they were led to regard the Sages and their followers as bereft of intelligence and guilty of (total) unbelief.[1]

Of the Rabbanites' condemnation of the Karaites, Ibn Kammūna says, "Some of the charges which I shall mention are directed against a particular belief of the Karaites, while others are general; the same applies to the answers thereto. My purpose is merely to remove the condemnation."[2]

Ibn Kammūna distinguishes between value-judgments and removal of condemnation to prove that his study is a non-evaluative investigation into the beliefs of the two sects. His objective is "merely to remove the condemnation" and not to "confirm" the beliefs of any of them.[3] This same method was applied with great success in his study of the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islām.

Ibn Kammūna's strict objectivity confused both his contemporaries and modern scholars. To appreciate his objectivity, Ibn Kammūna's works must be understood and interpreted within the light of the discipline of the history of religions. Scholars who are not by profession historians of religions are confused by Ibn Kammūna's approach to the study of religion(s). They can understand his objectivity, but they are bewildered by his method. They even go to the

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[1]Leon Nemoy, "Ibn Kammūna's Treatise," p. 115.

[2]Ibid., p. 232.

[3]Ibid., p. 232.

extreme of ascribing skeptical tendencies to Ibn Kammūna because of his rigorous rationalism. D.H. Baneth describes Ibn Kammūna's works as "Exceptionally interesting documents of the rationalist trend in the middle ages."[1] M. Steinschneider, according to Perlmann, considers Tanqīḥ al Abḥāth to be "one of the most interesting polemical works, because it sums up the material and treats it with a remarkable objectivity that smacks of rationalism."[2]

Perlmann himself describes Ibn Kammūna's approach as follows:

> His excerpting and eclectic method notwithstanding, Ibn Kammūna stands out as an original mind in his attitude of rationality, detachment, fairness, good will, in his playing down the deceptive import of religious differences, in his stressing the humanizing and social import of religious tenets and practices, as well as in the weightiness of his skepticism. Deism bordering on agnosticism permeates the little volume, in adumbration of a mood that became prevalent -- in Western literature -- three or four centuries later.[3]

Perlmann sees skeptical tendencies in Ibn Kammūna's reductionism of the religions he studied. For Perlmann, reductionism is a result of skepticism, and he attributes both to Ibn Kammūna: "One manifestation of this mood [skepticism] is that in the exposition, Jewish tenets (e.g., of Maimonides) are de-judaized, Islamic tenets (e.g., statements by Ghazālī, Avicenna) de-islamized in the attempt to reach the common denomination of human beliefs, attitudes, institutions."[4]

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[1]Quoted by Perlmann from D.H. Baneth, "Ibn Kammuna," in Monatsschrift fuer Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums 1925, p. 295. See Perlmann, Examination, p. 8.

[2]Perlmann, Examination, pp. 8-9.

[3]Ibid., p. 8.

[4]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

There is no doubt in our mind that those scholars, because they are not historians of religions, have missed the essential qualities of Ibn Kammūna's works. Whether or not Ibn Kammūna's works belong to a rationalist trend, they are not unique in the literature of the Middle Ages, as Baneth thought; Steinschneider's claim that Ibn Kammūna's works are "polemical" because they are remarkably objective is illogical; and while Perlmann is right in pointing out that Ibn Kammūna tries "to reach a common denominator of human beliefs, attitudes institutions" -- a statement which sounds as though it comes from a historian of religions -- his explanation of how Ibn Kammūna achieved that goal is greatly mistaken. The first indication of Perlmann's failure to understand Ibn Kammūna's method is his description of that method as "eclectic" and "excerpting." It is relevant to mention here that the same qualities were ascribed to the work of Saadia, and, most significantly, they are now attributed to the modern historian of religions by scholars who do not understand the nature of his discipline. We see no difference in attributing these qualities to Ibn Kammūna.

It is not clear what Perlmann means by the terms "de-judaized" and "de-islamized." He rightly says that Ibn Kammūna attempts to reach "the common denominator of human beliefs, attitudes, institutions"; if put in the terminology of the history of religions this would mean "eidos" or the search after essences. Perlmann does not correctly explain the process of reaching such essences. The skeptical implications of the terms "de-judaized" and "de-islamized" show that Perlmann does not mean by them a phenomenological reduction along with the

epôché, which, I believe, rightly explains these terms. The prefix "de" gives the sense that this process is anti-Judaism and anti-Islām. Ibn Kammūna's suspension of judgment was so complete that Perlmann thought that Ibn Kammūna had no sympathy at all for religious phenomena. A sociologist of religion like Peter Berger would have described Ibn Kammūna's approach as "methodological atheism" with the emphasis on "methodological." It seems that Perlmann's term skepticism equals Berger's atheism, with one significant difference: with the latter it is only "methodological." Perlmann seems to confuse objectivity with rationalism and thus claims that skepticism is the result. This might be true with rationalism but not necessarity with objectivity.

It is clear that Ibn Kammūna works from the assumption that, despite the differences in the manifestations of religious phenomena as they occur in different religious systems, there is a common essence which relates those different religions, not only those which are historically linked together but also those which might be thought to be very remote in orientation and in their *Weltanschauung*. On this basis, Ibn Kammūna defends Zoroastrianism, paganism and idol-worship. In order to make sense of religions that are remote and unfamiliar to us, we must attempt to see them from within. The common mistake is to compare those forms of beliefs to beliefs familiar to us without first understanding their real nature. To compare the familiar with the unfamiliar is to do an injustice to the unfamiliar. This reminds us of Max Müller's statement that "Before we compare, we must thoroughly know

what we compare."[1]

To penetrate to their essence, we must subject religions in their manifold differences to a phenomenological reduction in which these differences yield to an inherent religious quality which is to be found at the root of every religion. When religions are seen on the basis of that common religious essence, the commitment of the student of religion is to this quality as his starting point in the study of religions. Ibn Kammūna was so successful in his commitment to this starting point that he aroused the doubts of many about his religious convictions. It is safe to claim from Ibn Kammūna's description of the three religions that he was a Jew in his description of Judaism, a Christian in his description of Christianity and finally a Muslim in his description of Islām. And such is the case in the description of Rabbanite and Karaite doctrines. This was a method unique in its approach, and Ibn Kammūna applied it with remarkable success. Perlmann describes Ibn Kammūna's attitude as "unusual" and adds, "Indeed, the author seems to be aware of the unusual quality of such an attitude."[2] Ibn Kammūna did not aim only at reconciling religions and sects, as Nemoy has suggested (especially in reference to the Rabbinites and the Karaites).[3] Reconciliation was a by-product of Ibn Kammūna's objective. The "removal of condemnation" was the ultimate goal of his study but this term cannot describe the method he

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[1]Quoted by Wach from Max Müller, "Letter to Renan 1883," in Types of Religious Experience, p. vii.

[2]Perlmann, Examination, p. 9.

[3]Nemoy, "Ibn Kammūna's Treatise," p. 101.

employed.

To his contemporaries, Ibn Kammūna was a controversial personality. His rigorous and reasoned objectivity caused great confusion, and both Jews and Muslims claimed him for their respective camps. Even Christians might have made the same claim, though historically they did not.[1] From his study of the three monotheistic religions it is difficult to detect Ibn Kammūna's real religious convictions. For us, the significance of this lies not in whether he was a Jew or a Muslim. The fact that his religious convictions cannot be easily detected from his writings shows that he was an excellent historian of religions.

* * *

The scientific methodology of al Birūnī, Ibn Kammūna, and other medieval scholars of religion still needs to be carefully examined. Because most medieval writers on religions were scientists, their works on religions have not received enough consideration. The example of al Birūnī, as reported by A. Jeffery, applies to all of them. He says:

> It is rare until modern times to find so fair and unprejudiced a statement of the views of other religions; so earnest an attempt to study them in the best sources, and such care to find a method which for this branch of study would be both rigorous and just. Might it be after all that his greatest contribution to learning was not in the field of the more exact sciences but in this field of the sciences of the spirit?[2]

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[1]Perlmann, Examination, p. 6, maintains that Ibn Kammūna, "Having found that the Christians were not very effective in defending their cause, . . . proceeded to formulate arguments on their behalf."

[2]Al Birūnī Commemoration Volume, p. 160.

It is the goal of this thesis to initiate the study of the history of the history of religions in the Middle Ages by investigating the methodology of the study of religion(s) of two great medieval thinkers: Saadia ben Yūsūf al Fayyūmī (892-942 A.D.) and Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al Karīm al Shahrastānī (479-548 A.H./1086-1153 A.D.). Like other medieval scholars, Saadia and al Shahrastānī were especially known for their work on subjects other than the academic study of religion. By investigating the scientific methods they employed in the study of religion(s), this thesis will, we hope, provide a deeper understanding of the two thinkers and bring about a new appreciation of the medieval academic study of religion. Furthermore, we hope that this study will reveal the continuity in methods and objectives between the medieval and the modern study of religions.

PART II

SAADIA AL FAYYŪMĪ'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the "Phenomenology of Religion" -- the final result of many methodological attempts at the scientific study of religion -- has assumed a leading position in religious studies and has established itself as a major empirical science of religion.[1] Like all phenomenologically oriented research, it derives its methodological content (with various modifications) from the philosophical phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).

Actually, the idea of phenomenology itself predates Husserl. Attempts have been made to trace it back to Hegel and Kant. According to Quentin Lauer:

> In whatever context the term phenomenology is used . . . it refers back to the distinction introduced by Kant between the *phenomenon* or appearance of reality in consciousness and the *noumenon*, or being of reality in itself. Kant himself did not develop a phenomenology as such, but since his *Critique of Pure Reason* recognizes scientific knowledge only of *phenomena* and not at all of *noumena*, his critique can be considered a sort of phenomenology. According to this position whatever is known is phenomenon, precisely because to be known means to appear to consciousness in a special way, so that what does not in any way appear is not known -- at least not by speculative reason.[2]

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[1]Ake Hultzkrantz, "The Phenomenology of Religion: Aims and Methods," in Temenos, Vol. 6 (1970), p. 68.

[2]Quentin Lauer, Phenomenology: Its Genesis and Prospect (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 1-2. The restriction of scientific knowledge to appearances, Lauer explains, "is directed both against the rationalism of Descartes, which seeks a rational knowledge of all reality, and against the phenomenism of Hume, which will accept no scientific knowledge at all except that of mathematics" (p. 2).

With Hegel, the term phenomenology acquired a technical meaning. For him, phenomenology is a science which describes "the development which natural phenomenal consciousness undergoes by way of science and philosophy toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute."[1] According to Joseph J. Kockelmans, the object of Hegel's investigation was "phenomenal knowing" which is "the origin of the road which natural consciousness takes in order to arrive at true and authentic knowledge."[2] However, the term "phenomenology" is no longer used in this Hegelian sense, but to modern thinkers, it reflects the thought of Edmund Husserl, the father of the phenomenological movement.

Thus, the historical development of the phenomenological movement does not precede Kant. However, phenomenological analysis was used to a great extent in medieval philosophy. Moreover, it overstepped its boundaries as a theoretical discipline vis-a-vis its application to the field of religious knowledge. This development did not appear in modern times until long after the phenomenology of Husserl had established itself as a recognized theoretical discipline. It was subsequently applied to a number of disciplines including religious studies.[3]

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[1]Quoted from J. Hyppolite, Genèse et structure de la phenoménologie de l'esprit, Vol. I (Paris, 1946), p. 10 by Joseph J. Kockelmans in "What Is Phenomenology? Some Fundamental Themes of Husserl's Phenomenology," in Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation, ed. J.J. Kockelmans (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 24.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 24.

[3]Most contemporary phenomenologists, regardless of their field of study, follow Husserl's phenomenology, especially its methodological content, although many of them reject his idealistic and metaphysical position. Lauer mentions some of Husserl's followers in the following categorization. "Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Marcel and Conrad-Martins

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and analyze the phenomenological thought of a great medieval Jewish thinker. Sa^cīd ibn Yūsuf, better known as Saadia al Fayyūmī (882-942),[1] not only developed a phenomenologically oriented theory of cognition, but applied it to the field of religious knowledge. This was a prototype of our modern "phenomenology of religion." In the first section of this chapter, we will discuss Saadia's theory of knowledge, his critique of cognition that led to his philosophical phenomenology.[2] In contrasting Saadia with modern phenomenologists, we will have to preserve his philosophic idiom and language unchanged and give what we think is its counterpart in the terminology of modern phenomenology, the purpose being to show the unity we see in their meanings and the similarities in their usage. The contrast with modern phenomenology will be restricted to phenomenology as a critique of knowledge. Other aspects of phenomenology will not be discussed insofar as they are irrelevant to the contrast with Saadia's theory of knowledge. This will be followed

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are developing the phenomenological method in its ontological implications; Pfander, Geiger, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and Binswanger apply it to psychology; Scheler, Von Hildebrand, and Hartmann have developed a phenomenological ethics and general theory of values; Otto, Hering, and Van der Leeuw have studied religion in the same way; while in esthetics Simmel, Ingarden, Malraux, Duffrenne, and Lipps have been conspicuously successful. Among these same authors we find contributions to epistemological, sociological, linguistic, and logical developments. All are in one way or another concerned with the essences of the concepts employed in these disciplines." Lauer, p. 4.

[1]Saadia was born in Abū Suwayr in al Fayyūm district in Upper Egypt. In 915, he left Egypt to travel in Palestine, Syria and ^cIraq. In 928 he became tho Gaon (Head) of the Academy of Sura. For details of Saadia's life see Henry Malter, Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works (New York: Hermon Press, 1969).

[2]References will be made to Husserl and other phenomenologists as contrasts to Saadia.

by a second section, comprising Saadia's phenomenology of religion and its meta-religious foundation.

CHAPTER I

SAADIA'S PHILOSOPHICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

1. The Foundation of the Science of Judaism

For most medieval scholars of religion and philosophy, a theory of knowledge formed an integral part of any contribution to the world of religious and philosophical thought. Through it, they defined their exact place in the intellectual tradition of the time by adhering to a specific school of thought, by revising established theories, or by formulating new ones. Saadia Al Fayyūmī also found a theory of knowledge to be an essential requisite of the life-work he planned for himself -- namely construction of the science of Judaism.[1] In Kitāb al 'Amānāt wa al 'I^{c}tiqādāt (The Book of Beliefs

[1]Saadia was the first to establish scientific rules for a systematic treatment of the Hebrew language and a guide to the art of Hebrew versification. He composed a Hebrew dictionary and translated the Bible into Arabic for the first time and was the first to write a commentary on it. Henry Malter classified Saadia's scientific works as including: A. Hebrew philology (comprising grammar, lexicography, and exegesis); B. Liturgy (including poetics in general); C. Halakhah in its manifold ramifications (covering the various branches of the Jewish religious and civil law); D. Calendar and chronology (largely controversial); E. Philosophy (especially the philosophy of religion, embracing the author's systems of ethics and psychology); F. Polemics against the Karaites and other opponents of traditional Judaism (of diversified content and written at various periods of the author's life). According to Malter, Saadia's scientific work and literary activity "embraced nearly all the branches of knowledge known and cultivated among the Jews and Arabs of his day." See Malter, p. 137.

and Opinions),[1] he undertook the task of delineating the first systematic presentation of Judaism as a rational body of beliefs.[2] "Jewish science," states Isaac Husik, "in a larger sense begins with Saadia. . . . But the greatest work of Saadia, that which did the most important service to the theory of Judaism, and by which he will be best remembered, is his endeavor to work out a system of doctrine which should be in harmony with the traditions of Judaism on the one hand and with the most authoritative scientific and philosophic opinion of the time on the other. . . ."[3] Saadia's interest was "to construct a system of Judaism upon the basis of scientific doctrine."[4]

Saadia's concern for and devotion to questions that are particularly or exclusively Jewish should not prevent us from accepting Julius R. Weinberg's view that "his point of departure is that of the religious philosophers generally."[5] Saadia's attempt to introduce the science

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[1]The Hebrew translation is entitled Sefer Ha-Emunot Wa ha-De[c]oth, trans. from the Arabic by Judah ibn Tibbon, first printed in Constantinople 1562.

[2]Saadia Gaon, The Book of Beliefs and Opinions, trans. from the Arabic and the Hebrew by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 5th printing, 1967). This study is based on Kitāb al 'Amānāt wa al 'I[c]tiqādāt, ed. S. Landauer (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1880) and the English translation of Rosenblatt. All references are based on this translation unless otherwise specified. References from the Arabic are inserted for clarification of the English translation whenever needed.

[3]Isaac Husik, A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 24.

[4]Ibid., p. 24.

[5]Julius R. Weinberg, A Short History of Medieval Philosophy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, second printing, 1966), p. 143.

of Judaism was a crucial factor behind what is deemed his "quest for certainty." In pursuit of this quest, he investigated and analyzed sources of theoretical knowledge and established religious knowledge on a philosophically and rationally sound basis.[1] He placed the process of cognition under rigorous scientific analysis, and produced a phenomenologically oriented theory of knowledge.

Although the term "phenomenology" is modern, its meaning and its function are not new. The task of phenomenology, as defined by Husserl, can be related to Saadia's approach. According to Husserl,

> Phenomenology is directed to the 'sources of cognition,' to general origins which can be 'seen,' to general absolute data which present the universal basic criteria in terms of which all meaning, and also the correctness, of confused thinking is to be evaluated, and by which all the riddles which have to do with objectivity of cognition are to be solved.[2]

Saadia also investigated these sources of knowledge. He applied his own epôché and phenomenological reduction in order to derive the most abstract ideas from which he could construct a valid and reliable knowledge. Abraham Heschel describes the objectives of Saadia's theory of cognition as:

> . . . to ascertain what lay in the substratum. Where does knowledge come from? Is the human mind capable of avoiding errors and of attaining the truth? What makes our beliefs, judgments and perceptions valid? . . . Saadia's philosophy . . . is an effort to reach evidence about the main issues

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[1]A similar quest motivated the work of Husserl. His desire to establish philosophy as a "rigorous science" obliged him to seek sources and means towards the achievement of "pure and absolute knowledge." See "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," in Edmund Husserl, Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, tr. with an introd. by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 72.

[2]Edmund Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, tr. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian, introd. George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 4th impression, 1970), p. 44.

of thinking.[1]

2. A Phenomenological Structure for Saadia's Theory of Cognition

The following represents an attempt to reconstruct Saadia's theory of cognition in the light of modern phenomenological thought, with emphasis on Edmund Husserl. Special reference will be made to the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650). The latter may be considered a link between Saadia and modern philosophical phenomenology. Clearly, these two theories are temporally distinct and hence influenced by different intellectual circumstances. This limitation notwithstanding, their underlying structure is similar due to the unity of the subject matter -- namely the search for certainty through critical analysis of knowledge and the necessity for a subjective starting point. Successful reconstruction of Saadia's theory will lead to a deeper understanding and interpretation of his philosophy.

a. Natural vs. Philosophical Thinking

Saadia begins his theory of cognition by criticizing the habitual ways of thinking. Habit and nature influence men to think in a way which may lead to erroneous speculation.[2] The result of this kind

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[1]Abraham Heschel, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," The Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. 33 (1942-1943), p. 266.

[2]Husserl distinguishes between "natural thinking" in science and everyday life and the "philosophic attitude in thinking." According to him the first is untroubled by the difficulties concerning the possibility of cognition. However, philosophical thinking "is circumscribed by one's position toward the problems concerning the possibility of cognition." The problem as explained by him is put in the following question: "How can we be sure that cognition accords with things as

of speculation is that men think and believe in things which are not based on scientific reality. Saadia rejects any sort of thinking which is not self-critical, or, in other words, which does not ask the question of how it came to be thought of. He does not deny the possibility of getting true thought out of natural or habitual thinking but considers it as not always trustworthy and thus in need of cross-analysis. For example, he mentions a right conclusion of natural thinking in connection with the status of man in the universe. He says,

> Habit and nature place whatever is most highly prized in the center of things which are themselves not so highly prized. Beginning with the smallest things, therefore, we say that it is noted that the kernel lodges inside of all the leaves. That is due to the fact that the kernel is more precious than the leaves, because the growth of the plant and its very existence depend upon it.[1]

From his psychological observation of men and the way they think, Saadia classified them into four categories. The first thinks he has attained the truth about something and even if he is right, he is nevertheless in doubt about it, "being neither wholly convinced nor

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they exist in themselves, that it 'gets at them'? What do things in themselves care about our way of thinking and the logical rules governing them? These are laws of how we think; they are psychological laws -- Biologism, psychological laws as laws of adaptation." Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, p. 3.

[1]And this is the case with the yolk of the egg in the center, the heart of man in the middle of his breast, the power of vision located in the center of the eye, the earth located in the center of the heavens and finally, with man who is the center and goal of creation. See The Book of Beliefs and Opinions, pp. 180-181. Despite the factuality of this example of natural thinking, we should notice the scientific structure of Saadia's analysis of such a natural attitude.

holding it firmly in his grasp."[1] The second holds something to be true while it is in fact false.[2] The third is "the type of person who for a while follows one system of thought and then abandons it on account of some flaw that he has noticed in it. So he transfers to another system from which he also withdraws on account of some point in it which he rejects."[3] Thus, he changes one system for another and "so he remains unsettled in his life."[4] Finally, there is the one who has "attained the truth and is cognizant of it."[5] This is the learned man whose knowledge is obtained through the scientific-philosophical way of thinking and on account of his knowledge of ṣināᶜat al naqd (the art of sorting)[6] and his patient penetration into all the phases of this art. We must know how to think and how to complete our thinking.

It must be noted that Saadia reached this categorization of the way people naturally think from his observation of the Jewish community and the way its individuals hold their convictions. He then generalized these patterns of thinking to "the species of rational beings." In this regard he stated:

> When, now, I considered these fundamentals and the evil

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[1] p. 6.

[2] p. 6.

[3] p. 7.

[4] p. 7.

[5] p. 6.

[6] Al 'Amānāt, p. 3. It would be more accurate to translate this as "science of criticism." By the art of sorting is meant the "sorting of statements" which refers to the art of cognition through the application of reasoning and logical inference. p. 6.

> resulting therefrom, my heart was grieved for my species, the species of rational beings, and my soul was stirred on account of our people, the children of Israel. For I saw in this age of mine many believers whose belief was not pure and whose convictions were not sound, whilst many of the deniers of the faith boasted of their corruption and looked down upon the devotees of the truth although they were themselves in error.[1]

What is of importance for us here is not Saadia's statement of the dangers to faith but rather the fact that each of these categories of people is very confident that its way of thinking is right and the convictions it yields are the right ones. What is implied here is that in our natural way of thinking, we do not usually think of what we are thinking of, or even that what we might reach could be wrong. Here, the comparison between Saadia and Husserl and their distinction between the natural and the philosophical attitude is especially remarkable.

Saadia employs the contrast of nature versus reason to indicate "the contrast between transient riches and durable wisdom and knowledge."[2] On the metaphysical level, this contrast is made to distinguish between God's knowledge and man's knowledge. But considered outside of this metaphysical matrix, it implies that "the antagonist of reason is not revelation but nature."[3] This idea becomes clearer if we remember that Saadia believes in the perfection of man's knowledge within its human boundaries and when it is not compared to that of God.

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[1]p. 7.

[2]Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, "Saadia Gaon: An Appreciation of his Biblical Exegesis," in Studia Semitica, Vol. I: Jewish Themes (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1971), p. 91.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 91.

Saadia holds that God's knowledge cannot be compared to man's because vitality and knowledge are not distinct from God's essence while they are in the case of man. His logical proof for that is that sometimes we see the human being alive and sometimes dead.

> Therefrom we infer that there is something in him by virtue of which he lives and which, if it is removed from him, causes him to die. Likewise do we believe that man's knowledge is distinct from his essence because we note that he sometimes knows and he sometimes does not, whence we infer that there is something in him by virtue of which he possesses knowledge and which, if removed from him, causes him to be ignorant.[1]

Man's use of reason marks his humanity and the distinction between him and other creatures. Man's nature and habits, if not controlled by reason, become a destructive element in the process of man's cognition, and, in Saadia's words, make his actions resemble those of the beasts.[2] As Erwin I.J. Rosenthal comments, "Though Nature comes first in the building up and in disposition, it is Reason which decrees what to do and then man does it; if it decides something should be left, then man does not do it."[3] In the same way, if man leaves his cognition to be directed by this natural attitude without recourse to reason and scientific speculation, it will lead him to ignorance. Rosenthal adds that Saadia, in his Introduction to his version of Proverbs, states that knowing by nature "is not prone to provide knowledge especially in religious matters."[4] It is the duty of

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[1]p. 104.

[2]Rosenthal, p. 91.

[3]Ibid., p. 91.

[4]Ibid., p. 91. We have to take into consideration that Saadia's phenomenological analysis is basically philosophical and religious at

the functions of reason "to direct man's attention to pushing back and silencing nature so that he can seek wisdom."[1] In matters related to man's everyday affairs, if man's natural attitude of mind or his will tempts him to do evil, Saadia thinks that reason should warn man of the result of such action.[2]

In relation to science, it seems that this natural way of thinking constitutes the first element in thinking, or it represents that stage in our mental cognition which precedes scientific thinking and is subject to its critique at the same time. It is a stage where we face a reality existing for us as a matter of course. Our natural response to recognizing that reality brings us to a variety of interpretations, according to our experiences and modes of thinking, before we submit that reality to scientific investigation.[3] Science for

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the same time. Problems of cognition as discussed by him serve at the beginning a general theory of knowledge, but in the final analysis, he meant them to be properly used in the sphere of religious knowledge. Rosenthal is right in observing that Saadia -- like many other medieval thinkers of religion -- mixes philosophical and theological-religious speculation in interpreting problems of cognition. This will be seen clearly in discussing Saadia's phenomenology of religion, when his concept of tradition as a source of cognition is introduced.

[1]Wisdom (Ḥokhmah) here, as Rosenthal explains, is understood in the traditional sense of study of the Torah in order to do good and shun evil. This is a correct explanation when the matter is related to the way a man should handle his life affairs. Ḥokhmah here is considered in its wider sense which covers man's life in this world and in the world to come. However, in matters pertaining specifically to the problem of cognition, its philosophical and religious implications, Saadia is quite explicit in developing a rigorous scientific terminology to serve this purpose and to keep off the impact of man's natural attitude of mind on the process of cognition. Even with Ḥokhmah in the wider sense, there is a stress on the importance of study and the participation of reason in knowing the good and shunning the evil. See Rosenthal, p. 92.

[2]Ibid., p. 92.

[3]Saadia's categorization of patterns of thinking as explained above

Saadia consists of two stages, each serving a special purpose. The first, where essential natural knowledge is given as an introduction to science, can be called preliminary science. Each preliminary science is followed by an advanced one. Although the distinction is made for practical reasons only, i.e., in order to provide knowledge for different classes of people in terms of their intelligence and ability to know,[1] there is good reason for a classification of science into natural and philosophical. Natural science provides factual data from sensation or perception. The factuality of natural science provides a solid base of reality which, when explained by reason, helps in the establishment of philosophical science.

This classification of the nature of science accords with Saadia's theory of knowledge and is not related to any known medieval classification of Jewish sciences. This may explain why Saadia, the founder of Jewish science, is not considered as a contributor to Jewish classification of sciences. Works which deal with the subject of medieval Jewish classification of sciences do not give much consideration to his contribution in this regard.[2] The reason for this appears

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reflects the kind of thought we obtain in that stage of natural cognition.

[1]In his Bible translations, Saadia usually prepared a double translation of most of the books of the Bible. According to Malter, "the first, associated with an extensive Commentary (in Arabic Sharh) was intended for learned readers. The other called tafsīr rendered the text in a form intelligible to the general public." Malter, p. 145. Generally, introductions were basic to Saadia's works. They were written especially for the purpose of education and instruction.

[2]Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Classification of Sciences in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in Harry Austryn Wolfson, Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion, Vol. I, ed. I. Twersky and G.H. Williams (Harvard University Press, 1973). In this article, Saadia is

to be that these classifications follow the two types of classification of sciences attributed to Plato and Aristotle. The first divides the sciences into theoretical, practical and productive. The second divides them into logic, physics and ethics. In his search for originality, Saadia did not follow either classification. His concern was more directed towards a classification of the nature of science. For him, it seems, every science has to go through a natural course in its early stages which might be called preliminary science. It then moves towards the philosophical stage which might be called "philosophy of science." In all the Jewish sciences which Saadia originated or developed, he applied this method of classification.[1]

b. The Use of Methodical Doubt

After Descartes, it became traditional for philosophical speculation on the nature of knowledge to start with considering the problem of doubt which was then given methodological value. In the Discourse on Method, Descartes held that the object of methodical doubt was "to accept nothing as true which did not clearly recognize to be so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudices in judgments,

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mentioned once and for a matter not related to the subject of classification.

[1]However, it could be said that Saadia distinguished mathematics and geometry as "the origin of all sciences" and philosophy as "one of the noblest creations of God." Commenting on this, Richard P. McKeon said: "indeed like the Greeks he held philosophy to be an occupation worthy of God Himself." See Louis Finkelstein, ed., Rab Saadia Gaon, Studies in His Honor (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1944), p. 104 and Malter, p. 192. As we shall see in Saadia's concept of Wisdom, he classified the sciences into three categories: natural sciences, political and administrative sciences, and religious sciences, all included in Wisdom.

and to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it."[1] To observe this precept, we must systematically subject to doubt "all the opinions which we already possess, in order that we may discover what is indubitable and what can therefore serve as a foundation for the edifice of science."[2] This method meant to Descartes doubting all that could be doubted. To search for truth one should "adopt an apparently opposite course and to reject as absolutely false everything concerning which I could imagine the least ground of doubt, in order to see whether afterwards there remained anything in my beliefs which was entirely certain."[3] For Husserl, the Cartesian doubt implies that "we must not take anything as a cognition just because it seems to be one; otherwise we would have not possible, or what comes to the same thing, no sensible objective."[4]

In Saadia's system, there is an anticipation of Descartes' understanding of doubt. This has been acknowledged by some scholars.

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[1]The Philosophical Works of Descartes, tr. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 92.

[2]F. Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy, Vol. 4: Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 85. Descartes' doubt is, generally, described by Copleston as "universal" in the sense that it includes not only the existence of material things but also propositions whose truth might be evident like propositions of the mathematical sciences. Its "methodic" character lies in the fact that "it is practised not for the sake of doubting, but as a preliminary stage in the attainment of certainty and in sifting the true from the false." It is also "provisional" in the sense that it does not aim "at substituting new propositions" for the doubted ones. It is also "theoretical," not applied in conduct. Ibid., pp. 95-96.

[3]The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. I, p. 101.

[4]Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, p. 2.

Salo W. Baron, for example, maintains: "Saadia admitted that doubt per se was not unjustified, provided it led to intensive cogitation which resolved that doubt in favor of firm truth. There was even in his thought an anticipation of the Cartesian doubt, and of its resolution through the observation of the necessary existence of the cogitating individual."[1] Despite this acknowledgement by some scholars, the methodological value of Saadia's doubt is not yet constructed as a complete theory especially when contrasted with Descartes' and Husserl's doubt. Most modern discussions on Saadia's doubt concentrate on doubt as a philosophical religious problem in matters related to both philosophy and religion, but never as a methodological device for Saadia's theory of cognition. Abraham Heschel, for example, says:

> Saadia, more than any other Jewish thinker, was preoccupied with the problem of doubt. He was concerned with doubt as a particular indecision in belief between contrary or contradictory views, just as he was with skepticism as a point of view that denies in principle the validity of any judgment and questions the ability of man to attain the truth.[2]

Even statements which hint at methodological characteristics were not expanded so as to show their value for Saadia's theory of cognition. To quote Heschel again:

> [Saadia] analyzes both the absolute as well as the relative doubt, the definite rejection of the possibility of knowledge as well as the suspension of judgment through lack of knowledge, the uncertainty whether truth is attainable as well as the vacillation as to which of two alternatives is true.[3]

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[1]Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. VIII: Philosophy and Science (New York: Columbia University Press, 3d printing, 1971), p. 80.

[2]Heschel, p. 290.

[3]Ibid., p. 290.

Thus doubt is given a general meaning as "a state of mind in which there is a lack of conviction."[1] Heschel concludes that Saadia "did not accord any value to doubt."[2]

1) Doubt as a Natural Characteristic in Cognition

To begin with, doubt, the state of mind indicated by Heschel, is regarded by Saadia as a natural characteristic in the process of cognition. However, its methodological value appears in Saadia's opinion that doubt is part and parcel of cognition and not just the natural state of mind which Saadia found an essential part of human nature: "We maintain that the very fact of their being created entities necessitates their entertaining uncertainties and illusions."[3] This does not necessarily mean that doubt, as a mental state, cannot be eliminated. It implies, rather, that, methodologically, doubt is essential for any attempt at knowing. Men's acts and achievements need "a span of time within which to [become] complete . . . step by step."[4] Cognition is no exception. As one of man's activities, it is subject to this rule of graduality:

> Now the process of knowing on the part of men begins with things that are at first jumbled, obscure and ambiguous. However by the power of the intellect (quwwat al ᶜaql) which they possess, they do, in the course of time, continually refine and purify these [complexities] until the uncertainties depart from them and the pure essence (al Khāliṣ)

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[1]Heschel, p. 290.

[2]Ibid., p. 292.

[3]Saadia, Book of Beliefs and Opinions, p. 10.

[4]p. 10.

is extracted dissociated from any doubt.[1]

Saadia extends this phenomenon of doubt as a by-product of man's gradual process of cognition to cover all "human sciences or arts" and thus constitute the main characteristics therein. Thus, he says:

> Since all human arts consist of phases, if men were to stop in their endeavors before these phases were completed, the operation in question, such as sowing or building or weaving or other tasks, that can be brought to completion only by the perseverance of the worker to the last phase, would never be completed. In like manner does the art of cognition (sinā^{c}at al ^{c}ilm) require that one start in it at the beginning and proceed step by step until its end.[2]

Doubt accompanies us in our "process of research and analysis, the performance of which requires certain measures of time. Accordingly, from the first to the last moment of these [men] will of necessity find themselves in a state of uncertainty."[3]

It is of utmost importance, here, to notice that cognition is considered to be a science or an art. This may shed some light on the question of doubt as a methodological device used positively to establish the certainty of what we are attempting to know. Saadia's identification of cognition with science (art) is not without significance. He holds that cognition, like all human sciences (arts), necessitates certain "measures of time" between its phases. In these "measures of time," or intervals, the human mind rethinks what has been already achieved in the process of cognition. This rethinking, although it appears to us as doubt, does not imply nullification or

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[1]p. 10. Al 'Amānāt, p. 7.

[2]p. 10. An accurate translation for sinā^{c}at al ^{c}ilm is 'science of cognition.'

[3]p. 13.

cancellation of what is already known. Rather, it serves the purpose of re-testing and looking back at things as they became known. The gradual development of knowledge, according to Saadia, makes it necessary to stop after each phase and review what has come to be known[1] to make sure that the work is proceeding in an exact, perfect, and scientific manner. Thus, if there is any need to make a correction, this correction will not involve all the completed phases; it will have only to do with the latest phase:

> If he, therefore, were to stop in his investigation upon reaching the fifth or the fourth stage or whatever station it be, the number of uncertainties resolved by him would be in proportion to the stations he has put behind himself, and he would still be left with a number proportionate to the stations before him.[2]

To start all over again is, for Saadia, a waste of time and a return to ignorance.[3] Moreover, he considers it a violation of the methods of science. He says, "Every attempt on [the thinker's] part, therefore, to make concrete the ultimate goal of cognition would be tantamount only to rendering his speculation null and void, bringing about

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[1]To give an analogy from the world of art, the methodical doubt which links one phase in the process of cognition to another resembles the intervals which a painter takes while in the process of painting an object. The painter stops at certain moments to look back at his work of art in the process of completing his image. It is a look of affirmation rather than of doubt.

[2]p. 12.

[3]Descartes maintained that "If in the matters to be examined we come to a stop in the series of which our understanding is not sufficiently well able to have an intuitive cognition, we must stop short there. We must make no attempt to examine what follows; thus we shall spare ourselves superfluous labour." See "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," in The Philosophical Works of Descartes, p. 22.

nullification of whatever knowledge he may have acquired (ibtāli ᶜilmihi) and thereby a return to ignorance."[1] Earlier he said, "Aye he would be doing violence to and distorting the methods of science (marātib al ᶜulūm)."[2]

2) The Positive Quality of Doubt, or Doubt as a Process of Evaluation

In the manner described above, doubt was given a positive quality which is lacking in the Cartesian doubt and in Husserl's application of it. It is used by Saadia to function as a continuous process of evaluation of the results reached after the completion of each phase in the process of cognition. It is due to this systematical gradual process and the strong conviction that each phase is complete in itself -- valid both within its boundaries and in relating it to earlier and later phases -- that certainty is achieved through this phenomenological series of doubts. Each phase in this process constitutes a structure, a complete unit in itself. Positive doubt functions as the connecting link between the various structures, thus building up to a whole-structure at the end of the research. In this gradual process, doubt is transformed into certainty as we move from incomplete knowledge to valid and perfect knowledge.

Heschel claims that Saadia "does not regard doubt as a function of thinking but as the absence of knowledge."[3] We have seen that doubt

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[1]p. 87. Al 'Amānāt, p. 73.

[2]p. 87. Al 'Amānāt, p. 73.

[3]Heschel, p. 292.

is not only a "function of thinking," but moves beyond this stage to be a re-thinking of thinking. It is a purifier of knowledge rather than "a symptom of ignorance."[1] Instead of defining Saadia's conception of the process of cognition "as a successive elimination of doubts,"[2] it should be realized that it is a successive building up of knowledge. Thus, doubt should not be regarded as "a passing state of mind."[3] It is an indispensable, essential element in cognition; without it cognition cannot become a whole-structure. Heschel's negative attitude towards Saadia's understanding of doubt leads him to consider doubt as "a static, perpetual attitude," and, as such, "unjustifiable and fraught with peril to the soul."[4] As a perpetual attitude, Heschel claims, "doubt is a sequence to error, the result of a fault in sense perception or a mistake in the operation of judgment. By avoiding fault and error doubt will never occur."[5] However, as a positive characteristic doubt would be "static" only if the process of cognition had no end, but this is not Saadia's conviction. Nor can it be described as "perpetual," because this would mean that its nature remains unchanged from the beginning to the end of the cognitive process. Saadia holds that with each successive phase or structure we are building up knowledge. We move from incomplete knowledge to perfect

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[1]Heschel, p. 292.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 292.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 292.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 292.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 292.

knowledge, putting an end to the doubt which Heschel calls "perpetual." However, methodological doubt never changes despite the fact that it has an end. Its end is in itself the end of the process of cognition. It is only by keeping doubt intact, throughout this operation, that the thinker will avoid fault and error.

Saadia's doubt is radically positive. It contrasts with Descartes' universal doubt and with Husserl's partially negative suspension of judgment. Descartes attempts to "re-think philosophy" from the start and, in this operation of re-thinking, he negates all previous knowledge, philosophical or otherwise, in the hope of finding a secure foundation on which to build. Saadia's re-thinking is practical whereas Descartes' re-thinking is theoretical. With Saadia, it functions as a linkage between what precedes and what follows in the process of cognition. Doubt is practical because of its pedagogic value, i.e. one can use it in conduct. Saadia thus avoids the innate contradiction which is found in the theoretical doubt of Descartes and, to a lesser extent, with Husserl. Doubt is for both a purely theoretical reflection which cannot be used in conduct. Copleston explains that Descartes does not propose, through his universal doubt, "to live as though there were not moral law until he has deduced a code of ethics which will satisfy all the requirements of the 'Cartesian method.'"[1] Husserl leaves doubt halfway between practice and theory; he takes no position whatsoever. Lauer interprets Husserl's epôché as "a radical and universal elimination of any position of factual existence."

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[1]Copleston, p. 96.

Existence or transcendence "is bracketed in the sense that in its regard no position is taken either for or against." He distinguishes Descartes' doubt from that of Husserl by maintaining that "to doubt reality, be it only methodically, is to take a position with regard to reality, and this Husserl will not do; reality simply does not enter into the question of what things are."[1] Gaston Berger calls Descartes' universal doubt an attempt at "universal negation." Husserl limited himself to a simple suspension of judgment, neither sophist nor skeptic. Both "are reunited in the manner in which they assure the cogito: the 'I think' is not a fact one experiences, it is not an existence one grasps, it is the truth of an existence recognized by an intuition of the intelligence."[2]

3) The Possibility of Error

It is noteworthy that Saadia does not speak of a possibility of doubt, as Heschel thought, but rather of a possibility of error. The difference between the two is essential for the understanding of the process of cognition. Doubt is not identical with error. For Saadia, doubt is incomplete knowledge whereas error is false knowledge: "To be in error means to accept the false for the true."[3] And after the completion of the process of cognition, we are not allowed to speak

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[1]Lauer, p. 49.

[2]Gaston Berger, The Cogito in Husserl's Philosophy, tr. Kathleen McLaughlin, with an introd. by James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 108-109.

[3]p. 2.

of a possibility of doubt because what resulted from this process is rigorous knowledge.

Saadia distinguishes two kinds of error, an "error in perception" and an "error in assertion or judgment."[1] The first kind of error is explained by Saadia in the following manner: "the things perceived by sense are subject to confusion for one of two reasons: (a) because the seeker is not sufficiently acquainted with the object of his search, or (b) because he takes his task lightly and falls short in the thoroughness and persistency of his quest."[2] Still the situation would be much worse if to "these factors is added a third; namely that the seeker does not know what he is seeking. Such a one would be even further removed and more distant from his goal, so much so that he would fail to recognize the truth even if it should by chance occur to him or he should happen to come upon it."[3] As a consequence of this, a person might accept a false and defective knowledge as true and real.

The second kind of error is more serious because it is done willfully. Beside the insufficient knowledge of the methods of evidence, which makes a person accept false proofs for valid ones,[4] the natural inclination of man plays an important role in the process of the act of cognition. As Heschel explains, "irrational factors are involved in the act of cognition that may promote as well as impede its

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[1]Heschel, p. 293.

[2]p. 5.

[3]p. 5.

[4]p. 4.

course. The natural will of man dislikes labor and exertion."[1] Heschel sums up Saadia's presentation of these irrational factors as follows: "Truth is onerous and bitter" and people would rather "not be disturbed by it." Heresy, the greatest error, is caused by

> . . . the vacancy of mind . . . conscious laziness and ignorance; eagerness to satisfy carnal desires and passions; aversion to thinking and lack of patience and concentration; insolence and haughtiness; susceptibility to any influence; disappointment and resentment transferred from a person to a thought.[2]

The proper way of cognizing is when the soul of man "performs the act of cognition by means of its essence."[3] To stray from this principle is to fall into error. Thus, it is valid to conclude that Saadia emphasizes the methodological nature of doubt by insisting that after the process of cognition is completed in the rigorous, scientific manner he describes, it is impossible to speak of doubt as a particular indecision in belief between contrary or contradictory views. A process such as he describes must end in complete certainty through the positive transformation of doubt into knowledge; this gives doubt a great methodological value. No doubt is possible, only error, whose source is neither perception nor reason. Its source is rather the

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[1]Heschel, p. 296. Descartes himself believes in the infallibility of the mind if it is left to itself free from the disturbing influence of other factors. Copleston explains, "we may allow ourselves to be deflected from the true path of rational reflection by factors such as prejudice, passion, the influence of education, impatience and the overhasty desire to attain results, and then the mind becomes blind, as it were, and does not employ its natural operations correctly." Copleston, p. 84.

[2]Heschel, p. 296.

[3]p. 243. The Arabic reads: al nafsu ᶜālimatun li Zātihā. Al 'Amānāt, p. 195.

irrational faculties of the soul. Saadia maintains that when the soul of man is united with his body, three faculties make their appearance. They are "the power of reasoning (quwwat al tamyīz), the power of appetition (quwwat al shahwah), and that of anger (quwwat al ghaḍab)." All three faculties belong to one soul, but only one of them applies to the soul's possession of the power of cognition; this is identified as the rational faculty of the soul and the other two faculties are known as irrational faculties.[1]

c. The Idea of the Epôché or the Suspension of Judgment

After defining the nature of doubt and developing its use as a methodological tool which accompanies the process of cognition from beginning to end, Saadia proceeds to inquire into the nature of knowledge. In order to relate Saadia's stand on the theory of knowledge to that of the philosophical schools of his day, it is necessary to enumerate these schools and summarize their ideas. First, the Materialists (al Dahriyyah) regarded as true only what was perceived by the senses, and they rejected both reason and tradition as a source of

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[1]pp. 243-244. Al 'Amānāt, p. 195. Descartes follows Saadia in this understanding of the role of the body when it is united with the soul. His theory of "interaction" emphasizes that passions are caused in the soul by the body. In this regard, he said "What in the soul is a passion is in the body, commonly speaking, an action." Passions and perceptions are the same in the sense that one's passions are those "forms of knowledge which are found in us, because it is often not our soul which makes them what they are. . . ." Passions are perceptions, feelings and emotions. They are perceptions when they signify "all the thoughts which are not actions of the soul." They are feelings because they are "conceived into the soul." And they are emotions because they are "the most prone to agitate and disturb [the soul]." See Copleston, p. 151.

knowledge. The Sophists ('aṣḥāb al ᶜunūd) accepted things as they appear to us. They held that things as they are are not known to us. Their relativism shows in their attitude that all opinions are equally sound and that there is no objective truth and no universally valid knowledge. Saadia's report of them emphasizes their notion that "the reality of things depends solely on [men's] opinions concerning them."[1] In other words, things "proceed from opinions" and not opinions from things. His criticism of them implies the illogical structure of their thought. Opinions should proceed from things "so that the opinions formed of the latter might correspond to their reality."[2] According to this school, "things have no fixed reality."[3] A thing must possess two realities or more at one and the same time depending on our attitude towards them. Saadia considers this an absurd view because "it is impossible to meet all men in order to find out from them how many types of opinion they entertain."[4] Again, "if people happen to be too busy to investigate the character of a given thing and consequently form no opinion concerning it at all, that thing would become null and void and be completely deprived of all reality."[5] In this manner, false statements and reports would become true only because someone's opinion viewed them as such. To avoid such a conclusion, things

[1] p. 78.

[2] p. 78.

[3] p. 79.

[4] p. 79.

[5] p. 79.

must not be dependent upon man's belief concerning them.[1]

The doctrine of the Agnostics (madhab al mutajāhilīn) denied all truth, the possibility of knowledge and the reality of things. According to Saadia, the advocates of this school "feign complete ignorance," and they reject the "teachings of science," the "observation of the sciences," asserting that "nothing possesses any reality whatever, be it scientific knowledge or sensation."[2] According to them also, "reasoning does not lead to the knowledge of the truth."[3] The last school is known as madhab al wuqūf (the suspension of judgment school). Its attitude will be discussed in detail because of its direct influence on Saadia's philosophical attitude.

The concept of "suspension of judgment" originated in ancient Greek thought. It is traced back to Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360-275 B.C.) and the movement known as the Pyrrhonian movement. Its philosophy of skepticism was built around the view that there was "insufficient and inadequate evidence to determine if any knowledge was possible, and hence that one ought to suspend judgment on all questions concerning knowledge."[4] As a theoretical formulation of skepticism, Pyrrhonism occupied a middle situation between the Greek dogmatists who claimed that knowledge is possible and the Academic skepticists who denied this possibility. As a solution for these two conflicting attitudes, the

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[1]p. 80.

[2]p. 82.

[3]p. 82.

[4]Richard H. Popkin, The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (New York: Harper and Row, Revised Edition, 1964), p. ix.

Pyrrhonians "proposed to suspend judgment on all questions on which there seemed to be conflicting evidence, including the question of whether or not something could be known."[1]

This idea of the <u>epôché</u> was not new for Saadia and his time. He learned of it through a contemporary philosophical school which based its philosophy completely on the idea of "suspension of judgment." In Arabic and Hebrew, the school was named after this concept. In Arabic it is called <u>madhab al wuqūf</u> مذهب الوقوف and in Hebrew דעת עמידה which is a literal translation of the Greek εποχή. This school suspended the possibility of knowledge. They neither denied nor accepted this possibility. They believed that "it is proper for man to refrain from believing anything (<u>al haqqu 'an yaqifa al 'insānu walā ya[c]taqidu shay'an</u>), because they claim that human reasoning is full of uncertainties. We see the truth like a flash of lightning that cannot be held or reached. It behooves us, therefore, to refrain from forming any opinion."[2] They thus "refrain from both truth and falsehood."[3]

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[1]Popkin, p. x.

[2]p. 80. According to Popkin, the Pyrrhonian view was unknown in the West until its rediscovery in the sixteenth century. However, he acknowledges that there were "some indications of a skeptical motif, principally among the anti-rational theologians, Jewish, Mohammedan and Christian" who "employed many of the skeptical arguments in order to undermine confidence in the rational approach to religious knowledge and truth." Popkin, p. xi. He sees the culmination of this movement in Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century. However from Saadia's writings and the literature of the period, we know that the skeptical schools, especially this of the "suspension of judgment," were alive and constituted more than just a "skeptical motif." Their strong presence in the Medieval period functioned as a bridge between the Ancient Greek schools of skepticism and modern skepticism.

[3]p. 80.

Their negation extends to the idea of objective truth and at the same time they deny the possibility of belief based on reasoning.[1]

In Saadia's criticism of contemporary schools of philosophy, one can perceive some sympathy for the "suspension of judgment" school. He considers them "qualified for engaging in controversy insofar as they are not completely submerged in ignorance."[2] Indeed, Saadia accepted their main premise with little modification, and he tried to find a place for it in his analysis. As a "monotheist," he had to condemn their rejection of objective truth and their denial of the possibility of belief based on reasoning. This rejection and this denial were not, of course, absolute; characteristically, the school suspended judgment between rejection and acceptance. Saadia, however, while preserving the concept of "suspension of judgment," denied its negative aspect and used it as an essential starting point in the search for truth. In his attempt to reconcile the views of this school to his own, Saadia implied that the school of the "suspension of judgment" believed in sensation and the affirmation of the senses, which is a basic and major principle of Saadia's philosophy.

> The fact that they resort to their reason whenever they have need for regulating their affairs just as they resort to their vision . . . to their hearing . . . refutes their theory of abstention and corroborates the affirmation of the sciences as well as it does those of the senses.[3]

His criticism of this school stems from an inconsistency which

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[1]Heschel, p. 271.

[2]<u>Al 'Amānāt</u>, p. 67.

[3]p. 81.

he notices in their method. In brief, Saadia argues that the advocates of this school should apply their epôché to their own epôché. In other words, if they claim that no judgment should be made, they should suspend the suspension of judgment which they see as the only truth:

> Furthermore, I say that their very entering into controversy with their adversaries in order to compel the latter to abstain from reasoning also constitutes an abandonment on their part of their thesis and a tendency toward the recognition of the truth of the sciences. For unless they did that, they could not establish the doctrine of abstention.[1]

The turning point comes when Saadia tries to take the epôché positively. Instead of considering it the only truth available, he developed it to be used in his theory of cognition as a means for achieving objective truth. Saadia explains:

> I say, then, that if, as they would have it, the truth in everything consisted in refraining from thinking about it, then they would have to abstain from abstention itself and not decide that it is the correct procedure. Nor did I apply this judgment to them before applying it to myself, for when I acknowledged that science constituted the truth, I recognized also that it was by means of this science that I came to know that it was the truth.[2]

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[1]p. 81. This argument has become classical for most medieval authors. Al Baghdādī made use of the same argument in his criticism of the skeptical schools. As reported by Wensinck, al Baghdādī remarks: "Ask the Sophists . . . the following question: Is the negation of real knowledge real or not? If they give an affirmative answer they must be asked: If the negation of reality is not real, then the affirmation of it must necessarily be real. Likewise the question must be put to them: Do you know that there is no knowledge? If they answer affirmatively, they acknowledge knowledge, its subject and its object. If they answer: We do not know that there is no knowledge, they are refuted by the question: Why then do you pretend that there is no knowledge?" A.J. Wensinck, The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development (London: Frank Carr, 2nd impression, 1965), pp. 251-252.

[2]p. 81.

Saadia's statement is rendered by Heschel: "I conclude this from myself, for in believing that a certain statement is true I presuppose my belief in the power of thinking to know the truth."[1] According to Saadia, the certainty which men have about the existence of their souls and the evident functioning of these souls compels them to accept that fact. This is tantamount to Descartes' concept of the undeniable existence of the self. Saadia continues to indicate that it is through the awareness of one's own soul, that correct knowledge is obtained.[2] Like Saadia, Descartes was inspired by Pyrrhonism and with him it opened a completely new phase in the history of skepticism. Both, as conquerors of skepticism, were trying to establish a comprehensive system of evident knowledge.[3]

Whoever claims "the rightness of any idea, implicitly admits the reliability of human reason."[4] In this statement the reality of objective truth and the possibility of cognition, which are necessary as a basis for Saadia's understanding of the way knowledge should develop, are logically inferred. "Know, think, and believe"[5] are three essential steps in the process of cognition. To start with the

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[1]Heschel, p. 272.

[2]p. 1.

[3]At this early stage, Husserl was only a follower of both Saadia and Descartes. However, they all take doubt as their starting point and, in a sense, it is safe to claim that they all agree on one clear principle: to cure doubt by doubt itself. Of course it is clear that their doubt was wholly methodical and never a conviction as it was for Pyrrhonism and other schools of skepticism.

[4]Quoted by Heschel, p. 272.

[5]Efros, p. 150.

acceptance of the possibility of cognition and the reality of knowledge is taken as a matter of fact and through it the negative attitude of the "suspension of judgment" school is repudiated.

In contrast, Descartes changed skeptical doubt into complete negation through which he managed to reach "the ultimate conquest of skepticism in the cogito";[1] Saadia developed doubt in a different manner, giving it a gradual, permanent role in the process of cognition in which doubt eliminates itself step by step. Instead of regarding everything as false, a series of doubts will accompany the thinking soul in its gradual attainment of knowledge, and thus force the self to doubt in a positive manner.

Descartes indicated the difference between his doubt and Pyrrhonian doubt as a difference in purpose. The latter's doubt is for the sake of doubting. His doubt, however, is for the sake of achieving certainty. This difference applies to Saadia too; for him the end of doubt is ultimate certainty. Husserl, on the other hand, while accepting that conclusion, keeps the suspension of judgment a totally isolated step in his system. Within its boundaries, he is closer to the Pyrrhonian method than to Saadia or even Descartes, notwithstanding the latter's direct impact on him. However, he departs from that attitude once he moves from that step to proceed with his phemoenological reduction in the way towards certainty. If understood properly, Saadia and Husserl come closer in their attitude because their <u>epóché</u> is not a negation but rather a "putting out of

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[1]Popkin, p. 186.

action"[1] to use a Husserlian expression. Saadia, despite his acceptance of revealed truth, puts it aside till he proves it by rational argument. Husserl, too, puts out of action "the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint."[2]

d. The Discovery of the Pure Soul or Pure Consciousness

The value of Saadia's epôché could be seen from another angle in which he certainly anticipated the work of both Descartes and Husserl. It is the shift Saadia made from the realm of objective truth to the realm of "inner being"[3] (subjectivity), the realm of our own experience, or, to put it in Husserlian terminology, the realm of "pure consciousness." From the realm of subjectivity, Saadia then returns to objective truth. This three-stage process marks the distinction between Saadia on the one hand and Descartes and Husserl on the other. At the beginning of his research, Saadia admits the reality of objective truth on the basis of revelation and authentic tradition. These are the a priori concepts which, for the sake of knowledge, he must

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[1]Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Phenomenology, tr. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), pp. 110-111.

[2]Ibid., p. 111. Husserl continues his argument in the following manner: "We place in brackets whatever it includes respecting the nature of Being: this entire natural world therefore which is continually 'there for us,' 'present to our hand' and will ever remain there, is a 'fact-world' of which we continue to be conscious, even though it pleases us to put it in brackets." Defining his position emphatically, he concludes "If I do this, as I am fully free to do, I do not then deny this "world" as though I were a sophist. I do not doubt that it is there as though I were a skeptic; but I use the "phenomenological" ἐποχή, which completely bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence (Dasein)" (p. 111).

[3]p. 9.

suspend so as to prove them by other means than themselves. In discussing any case, he will start first with "what the books of prophecy (al risālah) have to say in each case, after which will be presented the rational proofs."[1] In applying this method to the concept of Creation he begins with a "preliminary observation" indicating that "our Lord, exalted be He, made it known to us that all things were created and that He had created them out of nothing."[2] Then he gives a Biblical verse verifying this statement and states that "Beside that, all this was verified for us by Him by means of miracles and marvels, so that we accepted it as true."[3] After stating this position, unmistakeably his own suspended position, he clarifies his second step by saying "I next inquired into this matter to see whether it could be supported by reason (naẓar) as it had been verified by prophecy, and I found that it could be thus supported in many ways."[4]

Saadia's discovery of the role played by the soul or the self and his affirmation of man's power of thinking is but a discovery of subjectivity as implanted in the human consciousness. The result of such a subjective stage of reasoning is an affirmation of the reality of objective truth which is now liberated and no longer needs to be suspended. As we shall explain in Saadia's phenomenology of religion, this is the stage of belief which comes after the two steps of knowing

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[1] p. 36.

[2] p. 40.

[3] p. 40.

[4] pp. 40-41.

and thinking. Whatever is known at the beginning is suspended for the purpose of reflecting and thinking it over. After thought is systematically analyzed, belief in what was thought ends the process. It is in this manner that Saadia moves from the suspended acceptance of objective truth to subjective analysis and then back to a free, unsuspended acceptance of objective truth.

Descartes, in contrast to Saadia, moves from subjective certainty to objective truth. The discovery of the cogito as the sole certain truth is the beginning of the realization that not all is uncertain. Thus, the cogito is the end of doubt; yet doubt was the cause of the acquisition of knowledge. Here, where Saadia suspends the objective truth revealed by prophecy, Descartes negates it completely. Through doubt, he discovers the cogito, the foundation of his subjective stand. The difference between Saadia and Descartes lies in the fact that the first begins with the suspension of objective truth known through revelation while the latter starts by the negation of all objective truth whether grounded in revelation or not. The second and third steps are similar in both systems: the movement from subjectivity to objectivity which for Saadia is a return to his first step (now unsuspended) and for Descartes an affirmation of the ideas which are contained not objectively in our minds.[1]

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[1]A quotation from Popkin might explain Descartes: "The axiom, that the objective reality of our ideas requires a cause in which the same reality is contained not objectively, but formally or eminently, provides the first crucial bridge from truths in the mind to truths about something beyond our own ideas, the first bridge from a subjective awareness of one truth about our ideas to a knowledge of reality." Popkin, p. 190.

Husserl chose the subjectivity of Descartes. The main distinction added by him was that the pure consciousness, which is defined by phenomenological reduction, is not regarded as "consciousness of the ego in the natural sense" as Descartes thought of it. "The ego in this case is not a man in the world, for the man in the world must be suspended along with all the bodily things. The world of nature and our beliefs in all existence are "put out of play"; they are suspended and "bracketed." Only pure consciousness remains, and that cannot be doubted."[1]

This shift from objective to subjective and back to objective truth seems very natural in its origin and development so far as Saadia's adoption of it is concerned. The controversy among the four schools mentioned earlier focused on two important problems which are by nature related, namely "the nature of objective or absolute truth and the possibility of its subjective correlative, namely belief or certitude."[2] In his argument against these schools, Saadia tried to show their attitude towards the relation between these two issues.[3] Underlying Saadia's arguments, however, was his conviction of the positive relation which unites these two elements.

According to Saadia, "man's knowledge (wisdom) is distinct from his essence because we note that he sometimes knows and he sometimes does not, whence we infer that there is something in him by virtue of

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[1]Marvin Farber, The Aims of Phenomenology: The Motives, Methods and Impact of Husserl's Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 65.

[2]Heschel, p. 271.

[3]Ibid., p. 271.

which he possesses knowledge and which, if removed from him, causes him to be ignorant."[1] It is here that the concept of the soul is introduced by Saadia to function as the real source of man's cognition. This soul is made of a pure spiritual substance and bestowed with the power of knowing hidden things and discovering whatever is concealed.[2] However, unless an epôché is maintained this pure soul will not be able to perform its function. Saadia speaks of demerits which have their impact upon the process of cognition and which change the pure essential substance of the soul. The activities of man leave their traces upon man's soul, either preserving its purity or rendering it sullied.[3] Thus a reduction of man's activities or a suspension of the sort of activities which affect the process of cognition is essential to attain purity of soul or inner being (pure consciousness). Because it is "pure consciousness," the soul is the best means of understanding, even though it is at the same time an object of cognition.[4] But in performing the act of cognition, it must work "by means of its essence"[5] which implies the necessity to avoid all elements which do not pertain to that essence. Here Saadia speaks of the rational and irrational elements in the soul which we mentioned earlier. The irrational faculties are the product of the union of the soul with the body.[6] This

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[1] p. 104.

[2] p. 207.

[3] p. 205.

[4] p. 3.

[5] p. 243.

[6] p. 243.

union is important for the well-being of the soul which "has no means, by virtue of its nature, of rendering this service except through the instrumentality of the body."[1] This union, however, does not stand in the way of the purification of the soul. Because the soul provides the various sense organs with their sense faculties,[2] it has full control over the irrational faculties. Thus, the pure soul is the one whose power of cognition controls all other powers: "The pure, clear [soul] that [has been] refined [is] now uncovered and capable of seeing (tajlū wa tankashif)."[3]

The process of refining the soul is a reduction of its faculties and powers to one power, the power of cognition. In this sense, it is a reduction or an epôché of our experiences with the presuppositions, wishes and desires which are the creation of the irrational faculties of the soul or the will which influence our consciousness. Thus, cognition is the essence of the soul (consciousness), and the other powers of the soul are only obstacles in the way to knowledge. To know is to suspend the work of these powers and to single out the cognitive element of the soul which is its pure and refined essence. All elements in the soul are reduced to the rational basis which is the

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[1]p. 247.

[2]p. 243.

[3]Al 'Amānāt, p. 198. The Arabic reads: fa al nufūsu al zakiyyatu al sāfiyatu allatī khalasat tajlū wa tankashif. Rosenblatt's translation is here based on another reading of the Arabic which replaces the statement tajlū wa tankashif with tajullu wa tashruf which means "exalted and ennobled," p. 247. We translated it, however, according to the original tajlū wa tankashif, that is, "uncovered and capable of seeing." In Ṣūfī circles, these two terms are used for mystical vision.

main foundation of the soul as a means of understanding.

Saadia's critique of reason is provoked by the fact that our experience of the world is produced by different faculties of the soul including the cognitive rational faculty, and so a reduction or a critique must be applied to reason itself as exemplified in the cognitive power of the soul. Saadia does not suspend the world of actual existence -- this would violate a Biblical concept -- but our experience of it as a product of rational as well as irrational faculties of the soul.[1] In so doing, he tends to reduce all elements of the soul to the rational element, which he considers as its real essence, and then tries to see the world within its light. In Saadia's philosophical system, the self and the world are seen as two separate entities and they do not depend on each other for verification. The relation between them is not of dependence but rather a subject-object relation. Because the self is a thinking self, it constitutes the world in its realm of thought. In interpreting Eccles 7:11, Saadia

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[1]Husserl also does not reject the world, but "world-acceptance," which constitutes the naive "prejudice" of everyday consciousness. However, the two meet in that Husserl's rejection of world acceptance is only hypothetical for the sake of the phenomenological analysis. As he states in the second part of his Erste Philosophie quoted by R.O. Elveton, "The world exists from the beginning, continually, pre-given and given without doubt within the certainty of its being and in its self-verification." Without presupposing the world "it is still there for me, the ego within the cogito, and is accepted by every meaning that it has for me, sometimes objectively correct with regard to particulars, and sometimes not. It is given to me along with all the sciences, arts, personal and social forms, and institutions, insofar as it is just that world which for me is the real world." For Husserl, the existence of the self is the basis for the existence of the world. "I am certain that I am a man who lives in this world, etc., and I do not doubt this in the least. See The Phenomenology of Husserl: Selected Critical Readings, ed., tr., and introd. R.O. Elveton (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), p. 11.

refers to one type of Wisdom which "refers specifically to the science of the elements of nature and the constitution of the world."[1] In another place, Saadia speaks of the soul of man as "more extensive than (awsa^{c} min) heaven and earth because his knowledge embraces all that they contain."[2] However, although the world is constituted within the soul's power of cognition, its existence does not depend on it. If the soul ceases to think, this does not mean that the world ceases to exist. The world is always there, whether it is an object of cognition or not. This point is essential for Saadia, who bases his philosophy of religion on the unquestionable fact of creation.

Thus, the discovery of the cognitive soul is a discovery of the self. The power to think is the only criterion by which the self is identified. This is exemplified in the opening words of Al 'Amānāt wa al 'I^{c}tiqādāt, where Saadia states the connection between the existence of the self and the power to think:

> Blessed be God . . . who verifies with certainty into rational beings the existence of their soul,[3] by means of which they

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[1]p. 406.

[2]p. 183. Al 'Amānāt, p. 148.

[3]Both Rosenblatt and Heschell translated wijdān 'existence.' It may be better translated 'consciousness.' The Arabic Wijdāni 'anfusihim may better be rendered as "consciousness of their egos." It may refer to consciousness of the ego" in Cartesian and Husserlian terminology. Altmann translates the statements as follows: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom the truth is known with absolute certainty; who confirms to men the certainty of the truths which their souls experience -- finding as they do through their souls their sense perception to be trustworthy; and knowing as they do through their souls their rational knowledge to be correct; thereby causing their errors to vanish, their doubts to be removed, their proofs to be clarified, and their arguments to be well-grounded." A. Altmann, "Saadya Gaon: Book of Doctrines and Beliefs," in Three Jewish Philosophers (New

assess accurately what they perceive with their senses and apprehend correctly the objects of their knowledge. Uncertainties are thereby removed from them and doubts disappear, so that demonstrations become lucid for them and proofs become clear.[1]

The pure soul, or "inner being"[2] for Saadia, is a rational soul by its very essence. It is endowed with the power to reflect even upon its own self. Saadia claims a superior place for reason over the soul,

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York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 25. The underlined part in this translation does not agree with the Arabic context.

In order to preserve the Arabic meaning, this passage can be translated as literally as possible in the following manner: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, the true in the clear sense of truth; who confirms, with certainty, for rational beings the consciousness of their ego[s] [Wijdāni anfusihim] by means of which they found [the objects of] their perception; an accurate consciousness [wijdānan ṣaḥīhan] by means of which they knew, in the sense of true knowledge, [the objects of] their knowledge.

[1]p. 3. Heschel's translation of this significant statement runs as follows: "Blessed be God . . . who is the source of pure truth and who gives men certainty about the existence of their souls." He continues, for "in order not to deny the evident functioning of the soul, we are forced to admit that man has a soul, even though we do not perceive it." Through this sure awareness of one's own soul, "the reliability of perception and knowledge was verified, errors were removed, doubts disappeared, proofs and demonstrations became clear and distinct." Heschel traced this idea back to Augustine and quoted from his De vera religione, "Whoever knows himself as doubting, knows something true and is certain of that which he knows; he is thus certain of truth. Therefore, whoever doubts whether there is a truth, has thus in himself a truth about which no doubt is possible. Therefore, he who doubts at all cannot doubt truth as such." Heschel also remarks that Descartes developed the idea into his concept of "Cogito, ergo sum." The idea which all of these authors agreed upon was that "man cannot doubt the existence of his own self and that the immediate certainty of consciousness is a warrant of truth." Heschel, pp. 272-273. It is relevant here to indicate the remarkable similarity between Saadia's statement and Descartes' reasoning as explained by Popkin: "The process of doubting compels one to recognize the awareness of oneself, compels one to see that one is doubting or thinking, and that one is here, is in existence. . . ." Popkin, p. 188.

[2]p. 9.

but the faculty of cognition which constitutes one of the faculties of the soul has power over reason itself. The cognitive power of the soul functions as a critical purification of what is furnished by reason. This does not imply that the soul is passive and plays no role in cognition. The soul is endowed with a "knowing force which, confronted by intellectual matters, verifies them, so that the person becomes convinced that they are undoubtedly the concepts."[1] Saadia identifies the soul as the place where all knowledge is concealed and of the reflective soul as the discoverer of that knowledge through its awakening by means of experience and through reason "working on the material of experience."[2] As Efros explains, the mind "through experience discovers ideas as self-evident, as illuminated from within," and then "the reflective soul discovers ideas as illuminated by inference."[3] A typical example of this process can be seen in Saadia's analysis of the concept of creation where he tries not to let his reason come to conclusions except through a sort of reflection on the self reflecting on the object. The thinking self, while in the process of thinking, is subjected to the reflective self which testifies to the truth of the ideas standing before the thinking self. The results of the first are obtained through learning and instruction, while the second unfolds and discovers, "awakens and recognizes concepts."[4]

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[1] Efros, p. 147.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 148.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 149.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 149.

e. The Process of Dropping from the Mind ('isqāṭ or ᶜazl) or Phenomenological Reduction

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the discovery of the "pure soul" or "inner being" is the cornerstone of Saadia's theory of cognition. The epôché and the process of reduction, which must be undertaken in order to isolate the cognitive faculty of the soul from other powers therein are mental operations whose final objective is to "uncover [the] eyes" to make them capable of seeing[1] so that things become "self-given" (to use another Husserlian expression). They become an object of seeing. Saadia uses the term "uncovering of the eye"[2] to indicate the necessity to bring knowledge to a mental subjective state where it is evident and self-given. As Saadia explains: "If . . . the scholar and the student will pursue such a course . . ., then he that strives for certainty will gain in certitude, and doubt will be lifted from the doubter, and he that believes by sheer authority will come to believe out of insight and understanding."[3]

In Saadia's analysis two important steps can be distinguished in the process of cognition. First, we have an epôché whose purpose is to separate what belongs to the cognitive power of the soul from that

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[1]Al 'Amānāt, p. 1, 198. "Uncover the eyes" is translated here on the basis of the Arabic tajlū wa tankashif as Saadia used it in Al 'Amānāt, p. 198. In Ṣūfī literature, these two terms are used for mystical vision.

[2]pp. 3, 247.

[3]p. 9. Saadia, here, quotes Ps. 107:42,43 which reads: "The upright see it, and are glad, and all iniquity stoppeth her mouth. Whoso is wise, let him observe these things, and let them consider the mercies of the Lord." p. 9.

which was created in it by the effect of the other irrational powers. This stage provides phenomena which are "self-given." However, the fact that they are "self-given" or subject to "seeing" does not mean that they could be used as evidence. Before they may be taken as "constituting evidence," the second stage, phenomenological reduction, must be undertaken; this Saadia calls a process of "dropping from the mind."[1] This second stage is of a rigorously scientific character; the phenomenon is subjected to a gradual reduction to its most abstract form.

The analysis made in the first stage results in the apprehension of phenomena now distinguished because of their rational character. They are rational in that they are the object of our pure consciousness; they are the work of our cognitive faculty. They are clear because they are not more mingled with the creations in our consciousness which derive from sources other than the cognitive faculty. We reach this stage through the suspension of the functioning of those powers of our consciousness which do not belong to the cognitive power.

These rational phenomena are complex, and because their structure is manifold, they are in some sense ambiguous and obscure within their purely rational characteristic. In order to reach the pure phenomenon, we are to apply a gradual process of reducing this phenomenon

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[1]Classical Pyrrhonism provided in a systematic manner a series of doubts to be exercised step by step and followed by a suspension of judgment on the question of the truth or falsity of the matter under consideration. Popkin calls this a "process of emptying the mind" which passed into Descartes' "method of negation" which separated "the Cartesian development of doubt from that of the skeptics, and led to the ultimate conquest of skepticism in the cogito." Popkin, p. 186.

from a complex and confused phenomenon to one which is abstract and simple. The final goal of this reduction is to reach facts whose character is certain and defined. To put it in other words, what we achieve in the first stage is a rational phenomenon but not a fact or piece of evidence; this is the product of the second stage of isqāṭ, the "dropping from the mind," whose ultimate objective is absolute clarity.

Saadia's phenomenological reduction has its own logic. First, we cannot start the process of cognition by applying this "dropping from the mind"; the reason for this is, simply, that we do not yet have a clear object for reduction. A scientific reduction must have an object for itself. This object was not available for us before we distinguished the objects which belong to the rational faculty of our soul.[1]

This provides us with another distinction between the two stages in the process of cognition: the first stage is largely a mental operation done within the consciousness of the subject. It is

[1]In Husserl's case, as Lauer explains, the epôché is "a means of eliminating all that is not part and parcel of the cogito, and he introduced the reductions as a progressive inclusion of objectivities in the cogito." This development resembles Saadia's search for the rational soul, his first stage, which ends for him as for Husserl, in subjectivity. The reductions in the second stage, as we explained before, are not eliminations, but the building up of correct objective knowledge for Saadia, and for Husserl this stage is the "progressive inclusion of objectivities in the cogito." Lauer adds to his analysis that "what is left is the reality (wirklichkeit) of the cogito, i.e., the pure life of consciousness, which is subjectivity, wherein alone objectivity is absolute. 'I am' is given, and with this is given a world. Because the world is given as 'over against' the ego, the world transcends the ego, and because this is true, the ego is transcendental." See Lauer, p. 134.

subjective in that the subject performs this action on its own mental structure. It is a stage where the individual becomes conscious of his own being and the discovery of that being is the most prominent task of this stage. One becomes self-aware, aware of what is going on inside his self, inside his consciousness, and from there he moves to reach what is beyond himself, what is outside of himself. The second stage, on the other hand, is scientific and its objective is to analyze what was reached by means of the mental psychological operation of the first stage. To explain this last distinction clearly: the process of reducing the non-rational to the rational is largely mental, psychological and thus subjective; the process of reducing the obtained rational product, and of reaching pure phenomena in terms of abstract facts and clear evidences, is systematic, scientific and thus objective. What is definite and precise in these two operations is that both are phenomenological.

Phenomenological reduction (asqaṭa . . . ᶜan nafsihi)[1] is a process of dropping from the mind all the non-essential elements which surround an object. The researcher "drops from his mind all . . . divisions that had rendered his objectives both ambiguous and obscure before his inquiry had eliminated these divisions one by one (ᶜazal wāḥidan wāḥidan minhā)."[2] The nature of cognition necessitates such a systematic reduction because "the person who speculates begins with a great many things that are all mixed up, from which he continually

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[1]Al 'Amānāt, p. 9. The Arabic verbal noun 'isqāṭ or ᶜazl "reduction" can be derived from the verbs used by Saadia.

[2]p. 12. Al 'Amānāt, p. 9.

sifts nine out of ten, and then eight out of nine, and seven out of eight, until all confusions and ambiguities are removed and only the pure extract (al khāliṣ al maḥḍ) remains."[1] This process is highly systematic and follows definite steps which must be completed in order to reach precise final results. The degree of knowledge obtained is conditioned by the number of steps completed:

> If, therefore, he were to stop in his investigation upon reaching the fifth or the fourth stage or whatever station it be, the number of uncertainties resolved by him would be in proportion to the stations (al manāzil) he has put behind himself, and he would still be left with a number proportionate to the stations before him. Should he hold on to what he has accomplished, there is hope that he may come back to it and complete the process. If, however, he does not retain it, then he would be compelled to repeat the entire process of reasoning from the beginning.[2]

The process of cognition starts from "the roots and branches out."[3] By this, Saadia means that at the beginning of our research we confront a notion which is general and comprehensive and according to Heschel's explanation,

> . . . we operate on it either by the successive elimination of certain elements in it, or by the addition of a qualifying characteristic. As the elements are removed, the idea to be formed becomes more definite; by each additional removal objects to which the process notion has applied are excluded, until we finally reach one special concept.[4]

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[1]p. 12. Al 'Amānāt, p. 9.

[2]p. 12.

[3]p. 89. In another place, Saadia remarked that "an edifice, let it be noted, is always built from the foundation upward, never from the top down." p. 112. Efros comments that for Saadia "thought is pyramidal. We begin with a broad and concrete basis; and as we climb the material thins until we have nothing to hold on . . . the finest is also the strongest." Efros, p. 153.

[4]Heschel, pp. 283-284.

This one special concept is called by Saadia the "pure essence"[1] which is reached through the power of man's intellect. This power refines and purifies the jumbled, obscure and ambiguous things until the pure phemonenon is completely dissociated from all these complexities.[2]

To apply phenomenological reduction, the researcher should be acquainted with ṣināᶜat al naqd which Rosenblatt translates as "the art of sorting."[3] Classification of statements into true and false, for Saadia, is an art, the knowledge of which is an essential requirement for any researcher. It is a measure of validity, and its function is "the sorting of just statements."[4] Any person who is not acquainted with this art will take false truths for real ones. At the same time, keen observation must accompany the "art of sorting (ṣināᶜat al naqd)," otherwise we will fail to reach adequate conclusions. Saadia says:

> Those whose knowledge of the art of sorting is limited or who have but little patience are presented as wrongdoers, because they wrong the truth. . . . On the other hand, those expert in sorting are presented as righteous men on account of their knowledge as well as their patience.[5]

To emphasize the necessity of the power of observation, he goes on to say: "Thus praise is bestowed on the learned, and doubts are removed from them, on account of their patient penetration into all the phases

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[1]p. 10.

[2]p. 10.

[3]Al 'Amānāt, p. 3.

[4]p. 6. Literally, ṣināᶜat al naqd means the "science of criticism," which in the modern Arabic usage refers to the science of literary criticism.

[5]p. 6. By patience is meant the capacity to observe carefully.

of their art after acquainting themselves thoroughly with it."[1]

The phenomenon of sounds is given by Saadia as an example of phenomenological reduction. "Sounds," explains Saadia, "are of many types."[2] The researcher will start with eliminating from the complex of noises those produced by "the concussion of bodies," the "cleaving of certain bodies" and the sounds resulting from "thunder and crashing and similar noises."[3] The reason for this and the next reduction is that no proof can be distilled from such noises. At the second stage, we reach "sounds produced by animated beings" from which we eliminate "sounds made by all animated things not endowed with speech"[4] and in this manner we single out "sounds produced by human beings through which all knowledge is expressed." From these we eliminate "natural sounds" and come upon the "articulate sounds" which consist of the letters of the alphabet from which "unconnected consonants"[5] are to be eliminated. From "connected consonants," we eliminate isolated nouns, thus reaching "[sounds of] connected speech" from which we eliminate any combination or utterance which "does not constitute a statement."[6] And because statements are of three different categories -- necessary, impossible and possible -- the researcher singles out the possible

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[1]p. 6.

[2]p. 10.

[3]p. 10.

[4]p. 10.

[5]p. 10.

[6]p. 11.

statement to investigate "whether what is contained in it is correct or not."[1] Such a statement must be subjected to "rational analysis" to exclude all of the other alternatives. Here, the researcher will find the "sole object of his quest" extracted and "left isolated, [free] from all ambiguity and doubt."[2]

The idea that phenomenological reduction starts from the root and branches out[3] is directly connected to Saadia's understanding of the nature of doubt and its methodological value, which we mentioned earlier. For Saadia, no reduction is possible in the state of ignorance which is the starting point of the Cartesian and Husserlian methods. From the point of view of his conception of the gradual character of knowledge, reducing every notion to complete doubt would render the process of cognition impossible. Saadia maintains that the natural process of cognition proceeds from a state of ambiguity and confusion to a state of clarity through gradual "intellectual attainments." An example is given by Saadia in trying to explain that darkness is the absence of light and not its opposite. Knowledge has a source from which it springs while ignorance does not have such a source, "being merely the absence of knowledge (<u>al jahlu ᶜadamu al maᶜrifah</u>)." "If ignorance had been something positive like knowledge, it would have been impossible for an ignorant person to be transformed into one possessing knowledge."[4] In cognition, one does not start from nothing because

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[1]p. 12.

[2]p. 10.

[3]p. 89.

[4]p. 89. <u>Al 'Amānāt</u>, p. 75.

ignorance is not a positive matter like knowledge. It is in this way that a reduction is possible.[1] We have a notion, which is a cognition in itself. This notion is given to us in a comprehensive, general manner and the task of reduction is to bring it down to its roots, its essence: "The data we use are concrete because they are derived from the perception of the senses, and whatever is subject to sense perception is a matter of common knowledge."[2] The ultimate objective is to reach the most abstract form of the data, and "whoever demands that the final results of his scientific research be as concrete as its starting point does violence to the rules and method of this research."[3] The violation of the method and rules of research mentioned by Saadia focuses on the fact that to return with the datum to its first condition is a return to ignorance. It is to take the rational object back to its non-rational state before the cognitive power of the soul was distinguished from the irrational powers.

Conclusion

Saadia's system of reduction fits perfectly within the general framework of his philosophy of science, which is based on his conception of man and his nature. Although man's knowledge is perfect within

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[1]pp. 89-90. "Man's progress in knowledge is gradual, because he starts from the root and branches out. Such progress from one point to the next is impossible in the case of ignorance, since there are no stations that have to be traversed, constituting as it does merely the abandonment of the knowledge of one thing for another and the absence of that knowledge."

[2]p. 88.

[3]p. 90.

its human boundaries, it is finite in character because it is bound by the limitation of man's body and whatever powers reside in it, including the power of cognition.[1] Science and its source are finite, and this makes them subject to man's power of cognition. Because of this finite quality of both man and science, there is "a last terminal beyond which no further knowledge is possible."[2] The data of the sciences are concrete or coarse, and all sciences strive, through gradual intellectual attainments, to reach the most abstract form. Once this most subtle form is obtained, it will be absurd to try to return to "the first datum of knowledge," because to "make concrete the ultimate goal of cognition would be tantamount only to rendering . . . speculation null and void, bringing about nullification of whatever knowledge he may have acquired and thereby a return to ignorance."[3] The whole system of phenomenological reduction will become of no value. This is tantamount to depriving all scientific research of its final objective. Thus, we may say that Husserl's notion of "back to the data themselves" is of no value for Saadia who might have judged it as unscientific procedure.

To bring this part to a conclusion, it is essential to notice that Saadia applies his reduction to both the subject and the object of knowledge with equal emphasis. The _epôché_ (_al wuqūf_), the uncovering of the eye (_al 'inkishāf_), and the process of dropping from the mind (_al 'isqāṭ_), are all attempts to reach with the subject a stage of

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[1]p. 89.

[2]p. 87.

[3]p. 87.

greater purity. Saadia's purpose was to reach "inner being" whose results are not only theoretical, as was the case with Descartes and Husserl, but which has practical implications for man. According to him,

> If the scholar and the student will pursue such a course . . . doubt will be lifted from the doubter, and he that believes by sheer authority will come to believe out of insight and understanding. . . . Thus will men improve in their inner being as well as in their outer conduct. Their prayers, too, will become pure, since they will have acquired in their hearts a deterrent from error, an impulse to do what is right.[1]

The discovery of the rational soul or 'inner being' represents the point from which the subject moves towards the knowledge of things outside itself. And it is only when the subject is at its greatest purity that such a knowledge of things becomes possible. With regard to the object, the reduction is highly scientific and systematic with the objective of reducing the concrete datum to its most abstract form, namely, its essence. Thus, Saadia's phenomenological analysis tries to realize two goals. In relation to the subject of knowledge, it tries to reach its "inner being" or "pure consciousness" to use Husserl's term. With the object, it aims at reaching its pure essence, the most abstract form. Without "inner being," the object's pure essence would be impossible to obtain.

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[1]p. 9.

II

SAADIA'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION

The question of religion was, for Saadia, primarily a question of knowledge. This explains why he was preoccupied with developing a theory of cognition which he used, ultimately, in formulating his theory of religion and religious belief, in particular his science of Judaism. Early in his work he became aware that true and correct belief is the outcome of true and authentic knowledge; he therefore made it his first task to investigate critically the roots of cognition, the sources and process of knowledge and to establish what might be summed up as the rules of thought. The system developed by Saadia was to be used as the foundation of all attempts to acquire knowledge, regardless of its subject matter. It was a universal method of research which must be mastered before the student indulges himself in any specific subject belonging to any of the known sciences. As we noted earlier, Saadia predicted the need for the invention of such a science because "our acknowledgement of the reality of what we observe becomes possible only by the invention of a science that verifies it for us."[1] This science was rightly called <u>ṣināᶜat al ᶜilm</u>, the science of cognition as an essential prolegomenon to the knowledge of all sciences. As such, it can be contrasted with the rules of thought which Descartes and

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[1] p. 22.

Husserl developed.

1. The Nature of Wisdom (Hokhmah)

Saadia defines wisdom as consisting "in knowing things as they are in their real, observable character, not as someone would desire or like them to be."[1] This definition gives wisdom a technical meaning which departs radically from the general use of that term in religious, or even secular, matters.[2] For Saadia, wisdom demanded an attitude towards the true knowledge of things which was empirical, descriptive, and free of preconceptions.

Wisdom is empirical because it endeavors to base its philosophy on what Saadia calls "the knowledge gained by direct observation" which in itself is based on a firm belief in the utter reliability of

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[1] p. 249.

[2] The term חכמה had more than one meaning in the Bible. Generally, however, "the line between wisdom and knowledge was not so sharply drawn in ancient Israel." The Biblical verses used by Saadia in the above quotations are all references to particular skills which, according to R.B.Y. Scott, "demanded special knowledge acquired through training and experience, in addition to superior intelligence. Wisdom and knowledge (da[c]ath) are so frequently associated as to be almost synonymous." Thus, "the primary meaning of wisdom is superior mental ability or special skill." In the book of Ecclesiastes, from which Saadia quoted most frequently, the word חכמה is used, as Scott has pointed out, in "two closely related senses: (1) intelligence, reason, the philosophical temper, and (2) the rational grasp of meanings." These two senses, with the previously mentioned sense of knowledge of special skills or of the sciences, together constitute the meaning of the term Wisdom for Saadia in the course of his thought. For the meaning of wisdom, see R.B.Y. Scott, The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1971), pp. 6, 8, 11. When used in the technical sense, "Hebrew Wisdom" or the "Wisdom Literature," the reference is to "a cultural and religious phenomenon in the life of ancient Israel." Scott, p. 6.

sensation.[1] As the foundation of all knowledge, ᶜilm al shāhid (direct observation)[2] is the first stage essential to the process of acquiring knowledge. Saadia considers "direct observation" as the first "basis of truth."[3] Accordingly, he states that "whatever is correctly perceived with our senses by virtue of a connection existing between us and the object in question must be acknowledged by us to be in truth as it has been perceived by us, without [the admission] of doubt. [This is, of course] posited on the assumption that we are [sufficiently] experienced in detecting illusions so as not to be led astray by them."[4]

It is on the findings of "direct observation" that reason performs its task of analysis. What is observed is valid for all time; as Efros explains, "sensation admits no difference in the degree of validity, for all men are equal in perceptual knowledge. . . . It is the foundation of all our concepts, the basis of all our knowledge. Reason extracts its cognition from perception even as we extract gold from minerals."[5]

This knowledge through "direct observation" is of utmost importance for the validity of religious knowledge. Because "knowledge

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[1]"We say that we understand by the knowledge of observation whatever a person perceives by means of one of the five senses; that is, by means of sight or hearing or smell or taste or touch." p. 16.

[2]p. 16. Al 'Amānāt, pp. 12-13.

[3]p. 16.

[4]p. 20.

[5]Efros, p. 137.

of the senses is common to all men," says Saadia, people who "have no aptitude for speculation can thus also have a perfect and accessible faith."[1] Even those who indulge in speculation about religious issues pertaining to knowledge need not worry about how long that process of speculation will take, for they have a direct source for religious guidance -- namely, religious knowledge obtained through direct observation.[2] This source is good for both the learned men who love speculation and for those who are "held back from engaging in such an activity by some impediment will,"[3] and for whom a "quick relief from all these burdens" is being provided by the knowledge through "direct observation." Concluding his emphatic affirmation of the importance of "direct observation" in religious knowledge, Saadia states, "Thus it became incumbent upon us immediately to accept the religion, together with all that was embraced in it, because its authenticity had been proven by the testimony of the senses."[4]

In analyzing the empirical characteristic of wisdom, it is important to point out the implications of Saadia's knowledge through "direct observation" for religion, especially Judaism. Empirical factors have always played an important role in revelation. Besides the revealed word, signs, miracles and marvels and visions were frequently used to express and communicate the content of revelation. Some of

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[1]p. 32.

[2]p. 32.

[3]p. 32.

[4]p. 32.

these instruments of revelation were witnessed by the multitude of the people.[1] Thus the experience, about which a single witness might be deceived, was verified by a group. It was through the direct observation of these signs, visions, miracles and marvels that what Saadia called a "perfect and accessible faith" became available as a basis for belief. Saadia so valued knowledge acquired through observation that he used it to validate even the Torah, as well as the teachings of the Jewish religion and religion in general. He said, "We feel compelled to acknowledge God's Torah [that has already been authenticated] by what our eyes have seen and our ears have heard."[2] Elsewhere he maintained that

> . . . even before the era of the children of Israel God never left His creatures without a religion fortified by prophecy and miraculous signs and manifest proofs. Whoever witnessed the latter in person was convinced of their authenticity by what he had perceived with his sense of vision . . . [and] by what he had grasped by means of his sense of hearing. Thus the Torah says about one of these [who lived before the rise of a Jewish nation]: For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children (Gen. 18:19).[3]

Thus the facts of religion became facts because they were objects of sense-perception. Saadia found it an easy task to prove this claim for the tenets of the Jewish religion.

Another implication, this time of a religio-philosophical nature, of Saadia's use of knowledge through "direct observation" reflects

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[1]Saadia mentions that because the knowledge of the senses is common to all men, God has often included in the Torah "the children and the women together with the fathers whenever miracles and marvels are mentioned." P. 32.

[2]P. 32.

[3]P. 33.

the classical medieval argument of the two ways of religious knowledge traditionally referred to as al sam^{c} wa al ^{c}aql (revelation and reason). With Saadia we could use the more empirical terms, observation and speculation. This conflict culminated in the Medieval period in Ibn Ṭufayl's story of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān who through observation and reflection "had acquired a knowledge of Nature, the heavens, God, and his own inner being, until . . . he had attained . . . the Ṣūfī vision of God, the state of ecstasy." The story implies that the two ways of knowledge, observation and revelation, lead to the same truth. The way of revelation "must be kept for the ordinary man because he cannot go beyond it. It is only a few who rise to an understanding of religious symbols."[1]

However, with Saadia we see one important difference: even the common man may reflect, because observation is common knowledge on which everyone is able to reflect, even if he is not philosophically trained. Thus speculation is only an extension of observation, a theoretical formulation of observation which the trained thinker is best prepared to develop. The way of knowledge, for Saadia, is really one and not two. The difference between observation and speculation is qualitative, not essential. This is by no means surprising, for Saadia made knowledge acquired through senses the basis for all attempts at knowing, philosophical or religious. This coincides with Saadia's answer to the question why revelation and prophecy are necessary, if all matters of religious belief can be decided by means of research

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[1]T.J. De Boer, The History of Philosophy in Islam, tr. E.R. Jones (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), pp. 183-185.

and correct speculation. His answer emphasized the fact that the way of research requires "a certain measure of time" through which "we would have remained without religious guidance."[1] And thus, revelation relieves us from the burden of unguided speculation and satisfies our religious needs at the time when we are engaged in philosophical understanding of the truth revealed. The process of acquiring belief is continuous; speculation is not a departure from observation.

To claim that something can yield itself to description implies that this something has a real, observable character. Wisdom, as "the knowledge of things as they are in their real observable character,"[2] depends upon things that can be described. The knowledge through "direct observation" of which Saadia spoke must be followed by the ability to describe what has been observed. In religious knowledge, description is essential simply because part of the content of religion has reached us through our sense-perceptions. The reality of what appears would be but a fabrication of our imaginations if it did not yield itself to description: "the truth is an assertion about a thing as it really is and in accordance with its actual character";[3] a lie is "making an assertion about a thing that does not correspond to what it really is or to its actual character."[4] In the process of cognition, to describe something by what it is not will have grievous

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[1]p. 31.

[2]p. 249.

[3]p. 142.

[4]p. 142.

consequences for our powers of analysis. No analysis is possible if it is based on erroneous description of what is observed, for this causes an inner conflict between our faculties of cognition. If the object is described erroneously, says Saadia,

> . . . then when the senses, perceiving it, find it to be constituted in one form whilst the soul, reasoning about it, asserts that it is constituted otherwise, these two contrary views set up in the soul will oppose each other, and, on account of their mutual exclusion, the thing will be regarded by the soul as something grotesque.[1]

In matters pertaining to the description of what appears, Saadia warns the researcher against illusions which may distort the image of what appears. Only experience can distinguish for us between what is real and true and that which is non-real and false. The researcher, says Saadia, should be "sufficiently experienced in detecting illusions so as not to be led astray by them."[2] We should not, for example, act

> . . . like those people who believe that the image which they see in the mirror is an image that has really been created there, when in fact it is only a property of polished bodies to reflect the outline of objects facing them. Nor [should we be deceived] like those people who regard the figure which appears reversed in the water, as possessing a reality which was created at that [particular] time, not knowing that the cause of that [illusion] resides in the fact that the water is deeper in measure than the length of the figure.[3]

Saadia suggests that before we observe a thing and describe it we must be aware of its reality and not be deceived by its appearance, which might be misleading. If we beware of such illusions, "our cognition of

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[1]p. 142.

[2]p. 20.

[3]p. 20.

what is perceived with the senses will be correct."[1]

In addition to its being empirical and descriptive, Wisdom, for Saadia, is free of preconceptions. This last characteristic is an intrinsic part of Saadia's definition, for he repeatedly emphasizes that the reality of a thing must not be based "upon [man's] belief concerning it."[2] According to him, "Things do not proceed from opinions but rather opinions from things, so that the opinions formed of the latter might correspond to their reality."[3] It is only the "reprehensible fool" who sets up his personal convictions as his guiding principle, assuming that reality is patterned after his belief. Notwithstanding his ignorance, he trusts in what should be shunned and shuns what is deserving of trust.[4] The Arabic text assumes, here, the difference between knowledge and ignorance as determined by the researcher's starting point. To convey this meaning the term _'aṣl_ must be understood as denoting the thing in itself and not as a general "guiding principle" as Rosenblatt translates it. _'Aṣl_ as the thing in itself would convey better the methodological implication of

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[1]p. 20.

[2]p. 80.

[3]p. 78.

[4]p. 15. The Arabic text reads: ". . . Al Ḥakīmu al jayyid man ja^cala haqā'iqa al ashyā' 'aṣlan wa ajrā i^ctiqādahu 'alayhī . . . Al jāhilu al dhamīm man ja^cal i^ctaqādahu huwa al 'aṣl wa qaddara anna ḥaqā'iqa al ashyā'i tatba^cu i^ctiqādahu." Our translation of this passage reads: "The accurate researcher is he who considers things in themselves (the reality of things) as his starting point and then bases his opinion on them. . . . The blameworthy ignorant [researcher] is he who takes his opinion as his starting point and then measures things in themselves accordingly." _Al 'Amānāt_, p. 11.

Saadia's philosophy. According to Saadia, the reality of the thing or the thing in itself is the starting point of the researcher. It represents the free state of mind of the researcher, his 'inner being' or his 'pure consciousness.' This is the source of true knowledge. Ignorance results from not considering the thing in itself as the starting point for research. Instead the ignorant researcher considers his personal opinion as his starting point. Direct observation of things in themselves and the description of what appears to the observer, all become fruitless if based on the observer's a priori conceptions. For Saadia, this would be a reverse of the principles of empirical research. For him an opinion is an opinion of something. Things in themselves constitute the facts about which opinions are formulated. Accordingly, Saadia maintains: "Things are not made of opinions; rather, opinions are made about things."[1]

Saadia's technical use of the term wisdom, requiring empiricism, description and freedom from preconceptions, appears to refer to the knowledge of all sciences. This appears clearly in Saadia's statement,

> By means of this wisdom [man] is able to retain all the events of the past and foresee many of the eventualities of the future, and achieve the subjugation of the animals so as to make them till the soil for him and transport for him its harvests. By means of it, too, he succeeds in extracting water from the depths of the earth to the points where it flows on its surface. . . .[2]

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[1]Al 'Amānāt, p. 66. The Arabic reads: "'inna al ashyā'a laysa min 'ajli al i^{c}tiqādāti kānat wa 'innamā al 'i^{c}tiqādātu hiya allatī kānat min 'ajli al ashyā'i litaḥaṣṣulihā ^{c}alā ḥaqā'iqihā."

[2]Saadia continues, "Nay, he makes himself water-wheels by means of which the soil is automatically watered. By dint of this wisdom he is furthermore able to build the most exquisite dwellings, wear the choicest garments, and prepare the most delicious foods. By means of it

Elsewhere, Saadia speaks of man's activities and the developments he undertakes as being carried out "by means of wisdom and deliberation and a knowledge of engineering and planning."[1] For unless "he who engages in these activities possesses a broad knowledge of these subjects, he [can] not achieve aught of that which he aims for."[2] Wisdom in all these quotations refers to the achievements of the science of history, political science, administration, planning, engineering and the natural sciences.

In his interpretation of Eccles. 9:16, 9:18 and 7:11,[3] Saadia classifies wisdom into three different types. This classification can be applied to all the sciences. He understood the word "good," טובה , in Eccles. 5:17 as referring to the three different types of wisdom in the above-mentioned verses from Eccles. According to Saadia,

> Each of these verses has its particular point of reference. Thus *Wisdom is good with an inheritance* refers specifically to the science of the elements of nature and the constitution of the world. . . . *Wisdom is better than strength,* again, points specifically to the administrative functions of rulers and the government. . . . As for *Wisdom is better than weapons of war,* finally, that refers to divine worship and obedience of God.[4]

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he becomes capable also of leading hosts and armies and of exercising governmental authority in such a way that men will allow themselves to be bound and ruled thereby. By means of it, moreover, he attains to the knowledge of the disposition of the heavenly spheres and the course of the stars and the measurements of their masses and their distances and all the rest of their attributes." p. 182.

[1]p. 383.

[2]p. 383.

[3]The parts that concern us from these verses read as follows:

Eccles. 9:16	טובה חכמה מגבורה
Eccles. 9:18	טובה חכמה מכלי קרב
Eccles. 7:11	טובה חכמה עם-נחלה

[4]p. 406.

This classification refers to the natural sciences, the political and administrative sciences and finally the religious sciences. In including all the sciences in the term Ḥokhmah, Saadia suggests not only their unity, regardless of their subject matter, but also their susceptibility to a single method of study. Descartes too identified all the sciences with human wisdom. The unity of method implies a unity of the sciences and thus presupposes the existence of one kind of knowledge. As Copleston says,

> All the sciences taken together 'are identical with human wisdom which always remains one and the same, however applied to different subjects.' There is only one kind of knowledge, certain and evident knowledge. And ultimately there is only one science, though it possesses interconnected branches. Hence there can be only one scientific method.[1]

Husserl, in contrast, could not eliminate the gap between phenomenology in theory and in application. His phenomenology distinguishes itself by the fact that it was meant to be situated above the sciences. For him, it seems, phenomenology is firstly a method; because of this it cannot be identified with Saadia's concept of wisdom. For Husserl, "Phenomenology . . . denotes a science, a system of scientific disciplines. But it also and above all denotes a method and an attitude of mind, the specifically philosophical attitude of mind, the specifically philosophical method."[2] Elsewhere Husserl calls phenomenology a "critique of the specialized sciences" and a metaphysical evaluation of them.[3] In this, the methodological value of

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[1]Copleston, p. 81.

[2]Husserl, The Idea of Phenomenology, p. 19.

[3]Ibid., p. 11.

phenomenology is emphasized, but at the same time we cannot infer from this an identification of phenomenology with the specialized sciences as is the case with Saadia.

2. The Phenomenon of Belief

The attempt to base all knowledge on "direct observation" and to transform things into observable objects through the subjective mental operation has left its impact upon Saadia's understanding of the phenomenon of belief. His definition of belief reflects this phenomenological operation which stresses the correspondence between reality and appearance. What is real appears and what appears has to be real. Thus, belief is "a notion (ma^{c}nā) that arises in the soul in regard to the actual character of anything that is apprehended."[1] This belief is the end of a process of investigation and analysis which operates within our minds and is tested by our souls: "When the cream of investigation emerges [and] is embraced and enfolded by the minds, and through them acquired and digested by the souls, then the person becomes convinced of the truth of the notion he has thus acquired."[2] Becoming an accepted belief, the notion is to be deposited "in the soul for a future occasion or for future occasions."[3]

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[1]p. 14. Efros quotes Saadia saying: "'Man must first know, then reflect and discern, and then believe' implying confidence in a belief which follows the synthetic and analytic process of thought." Falsehood, on the other hand, applies to that kind of belief which is described as "'a notion springing in the soul' without investigation or proof." Efros, p. 157.

[2]p. 14.

[3]p. 14.

"True belief" and "false belief" are, then, categories used by Saadia to indicate the degree of agreement between the notion (ma^c^nā) we hold and the manner in which it appears to us in reality. "A true belief consists in believing a thing to be as it really is (^c^alā mā huwa); namely, that much is much, and little is little, and black is black, and white is white, and that what exists exists, and what is non-existent is non-existent."[1] Accordingly, a false belief "consists in believing a thing to be the opposite of what it actually is (bi Khilāfi mā huwa), such as that much is little, and little is much, and white is black, and black is white, and that what exists is non-existent, and what is non-existent exists."[2]

Because this categorization of belief can be applied to all knowledge, it has been interpreted by H.A. Wolfson as reflecting the epistemological aspect of a double faith theory which can be traced

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[1]p. 14. Al 'Amānāt, p. 11.

[2]p. 14. Efros traces Saadia's opinion to the Aristotelian correspondence-theory of truth, and he quotes Aristotle's Metaph., IX, 10 which states: "It is not because we are right in thinking that you are white that you are white; it is because you are white that we are right in saying so." See Efros, pp. 156-157. Heschel agrees with Efros' tracing of Saadia's theory to Aristotle. He speaks of the notion of truth as "a correspondence between thinking and being [which] is established upon confidence in both sense perception and the power of reason. Our senses, it is assumed, render to our consciousness reality as it is . . . and our reason possesses adequate ideas. . . . Hence, we are able to form judgments that represent reality faithfully." Heschel speaks of Saadia's use of the concept of "coherence" as a supplement to the criterion of correspondence "for events in which it cannot be used." By it, he meant that "A true proposition is a significant whole in which all constituent elements reciprocally involve each other. A proposition is not true if its parts collide among themselves, or clash with other principles accepted in the wide sphere of experience." Heschel, pp. 287-288.

back to the Aristotelian double faith theory. Wolfson claims that Saadia, among other Medieval thinkers, adopted the double faith theory and was the first to introduce that theory into medieval Arabic philosophy, Jewish or Muslim.[1] Wolfson explains that as a purely epistemological term, "the term faith is used by [Saadia] in the sense of a judgment of the truth of both immediate and derivative knowledge."[2] As a religious term, "it is used . . . in the sense of the judgment of the truth of Scriptural teachings both with demonstration and without demonstration."[3] The two kinds of faith in its religious sense, Wolfson continues, are considered by Saadia as equally perfect, "each of them being the perfect religion for those to whose needs it is adapted."[4]

Now, the difficulty with applying the double faith theory to Saadia is that it makes a clear distinction between his theory of cognition as an epistemological theory and between its application to the field of religious knowledge. Saadia would not admit this distinction because it assumes that religious knowledge springs from a source which is utterly different from the sources of other knowledges. This, of course, would contradict Saadia's insistence on founding all knowledge, including religious knowledge, upon "direct observation,"

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[1]Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Double Faith Theory in Clement, Saadia, Averroes and St. Thomas, and Its Origin in Aristotle and the Stoics," The Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. XXXIII (Philadelphia, 1942), p. 231.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 231.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 231.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 231.

an insistence which made him identify authentic tradition with knowledge based upon observation, the standard criterion of validation according to Saadia. Saadia attributes perfection to both ways of knowledge in religion because he believes that both have the same source, observation. The difference lies in the process each way involves and not in the quality of the result.

Within the phenomenological structure given above, the double faith theory would not be an attempt to reconcile the rationalist trend with the authoritarian but rather a movement from phenomenology as a method to phenomenology in application. In this sense, the word "double" would lose its meaning because in moving from phenomenology itself to phenomenology of religion, we are not shifting from one single faith to another; we are, rather, moving from theoretical methodology to application. Wolfson seems to think the development is from epistemological to religious, but Saadia seems to hold that the entire process is epistemological no matter what the subject of knowledge may be. Religious knowledge is based on epistemological foundations which can be applied to all knowledge. Thus, Saadia uses the term i^{c}tiqād (belief) which he explains simply as ma^{c}nā (a notion), as generally applicable to knowledge, religious or otherwise. Even Wolfson acknowledges that with Saadia "the two aspects of the term are merged together."[1] To merge them is, we believe, Saadia's intention.

The double faith theory cannot be applied to Saadia because it is concerned only with attitudes toward religious knowledge. And since

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[1]Wolfson, p. 231.

religion is a subject for knowledge, Saadia (as we saw in the discussion of his theory of cognition) subjects it to a universal epistemology applicable to all sciences, including religion. Confusion arises from the attempt to restrict Saadia's notion of belief to the religious sense, as Wolfson does, instead of accepting that Saadia based religious "belief" on a general theory of knowledge. He held that the source of all data, religious or scientific, is one, and the method of interpreting these data is one. He nevertheless acknowledged that each science uses different tools for carrying out the single process.[1] Saadia used the term wisdom to cover all the sciences, to indicate unity of method with variety of tools.

This trend of thought is even true of Saadia's analysis of the phenomenon of heresy. Heresy is understood by Saadia not in a dogmatic sense, but rather as a product of an imperfect process of knowing. It is, like doubt, the absence of knowledge. The causes of heresy which Saadia distinguishes are conveniently summarized by Heschel:

> Thus heresy, which Saadia must have regarded as the greatest error, is caused by the vacancy of mind from which many people suffer, their conscious laziness and ignorance; eagerness to satisfy carnal desires and passions; aversion to thinking and lack of patience and concentration; insolence and haughtiness; susceptibility to any influence; disappointment and resentment transferred from a person to a thought.[2]

All these, of course, are effects of the irrational faculties of the soul which disturb the cognitive faculty and hinder the process of

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[1]p. 251.

[2]Heschel, p. 296.

cognition. Saadia does not restrict the term heresy to its characteristically religious sense, to indicate deviation from orthodoxy; he uses it in other areas of knowledge to indicate errors caused by lack of knowledge and mistaken methodology. Saadia's definition of belief implies that belief is a "mental attitude" regarding something known.[1] Heschel explains, "it is the subjective correlative of objective knowledge as doubt is the correlative of error. To believe is to hold an idea as true even if we do not perceive it to be true."[2] Thus, as Heschel correctly observes, Saadia holds that belief "is a subjective phenomenon that involves inner certainty but does not necessarily represent the truth."[3]

To sum up, it is essential for the better understanding of Saadia's phenomenological analysis to consider the concept of <u>'i^c tiqād</u> as reflecting an epistemological attitude rather than theological or religious ones. The universal method which Saadia sought from the start compels us to consider the term in this light. Since belief is founded upon observation, it is the same within any field of knowledge. It is an "attitude of the mind toward the object of its apprehension," and its essence "consists in acquiescence in the reality

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[1] "The essence of belief . . . consists in acquiescence in the reality of an object or in assent to the truth of a proposition. It is the attitude of the mind toward the object of its apprehension and implies more than mere thinking or simple awareness. In the act of believing, the object is not only apprehended by the mind but regarded as real or unreal, true or false. One cannot believe what one does not apprehend, yet one may apprehend a thing without believing it." Heschel, p. 303.

[2] Ibid., p. 299.

[3] Ibid., p. 396.

of an object or in assent to the truth of a proposition."[1] Our power of observation "renders to our consciousness reality as it is," and our power of reason provides us with adequate ideas; by using both powers we can form conclusions which represent the real condition of what appears.[2] The reliability of both sense perception and reason are beyond any doubt and to deny them is to deny the fundamentals of religion itself.[3] In cases where appearance is not possible, coherence between the structural elements of a proposition is a necessity. Belief, then, must constitute a "significant whole" in which all constituting elements combine to give an intelligible structure which is accepted within the boundaries of our experience; otherwise it will constitute a contradiction and a distortion of experienced facts.[4]

3. The Methodology of the Study of Religion

From the understanding of "belief" as purely epistemological and of wisdom as empirical, descriptive and free of preconceptions, and as including the knowledge of all the sciences, it is logical to conclude that these sciences must be of the same character as wisdom itself. Wisdom constitutes the way of understanding the roots and essence of the sciences. To put Saadia's definition in modern terms, wisdom is a phenomenology of the sciences. It provides us with a

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[1]Heschel, p. 303.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 287; Saadia, pp. 16-17.

[3]p. 18.

[4]pp. 23-25.

methodology for determining how the knowledge of the sciences came about and what is the shape of the cognitive operation through which this knowledge is obtained. Wisdom is the sciences with an intrinsic technique of self-criticism which does not allow us to separate between the form and the content, the method and the application.

a. <u>The Nature of Research in Religion</u>

As we mentioned earlier, the religious sciences constitute a part of Wisdom and must be studied by the same method as any other branch of Wisdom -- a method empirical, descriptive, and free of preconceptions. The authenticity of this method depends on the assumption that phenomena are subjected to our senses before we speculate about them or analyze them. This is important for Saadia; he holds that this way of knowing about religion is available to anyone. Hence knowledge about religion can be universal.[1] Saadia emphasizes this for practical reasons. Among these is the fact that all people do not possess the same power of comprehension. Someone might be convinced of the authenticity of belief "by what he had perceived with his sense of vision . . . [or] by what he had grasped by means of his sense of hearing."[2] Another person might need proofs other than those given by the senses. "Each one according to his understanding"[3] and "the effort

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[1]p. 32.

[2]p. 33.

[3]p. 33. Thus Saadia may be included among the group of medieval thinkers which Herbert A. Davidson calls "liberal thinkers" who "developed the theory that truth can be -- and for psychological reasons must be -- presented in different forms to different audiences; Scripture

he can put into it and the obstacles he might encounter"[1] work as the criterion for the choice between belief resulting from knowledge provided by the senses and belief obtained through speculation.

The empirical descriptive basis of belief is necessary also because the conclusions of speculation are not always correct. Without denying speculation as a source for our religious knowledge, we have to admit that the person who speculates "may either hit the mark or miss it."[2] And "until he hits it . . . he [will] be without religious faith, and even when he has hit upon the teaching of religion and has it firmly in hand, he is not secure against being deprived of it again by some uncertainty that might arise in his mind and corrupt his belief."[3] This statement implies that while the result of speculation is not final by the very nature of speculation itself, speculation

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could accordingly be viewed as a popular and figurative version of the very truth put forward by philosophy." Herbert A. Davidson, "The Study of Philosophy as a Religious Obligation," Religion in a Religious Age, p. 54.

[1]p. 33.

[2]p. 27.

[3]p. 27. It is interesting to note that Wach agrees with Saadia on the necessity to believe in the content of religion before subjecting it to analysis. The fear that one may remain without belief is expressed by Wach as follows: "If history of religions were supposed to tell us what we ought to believe, we would wait for such information for a long time. . . . The ability to decide 'what must I believe?' lies . . . outside the sphere of a scientific discipline." As we have said before, speculation, for Saadia, does not replace religion. Its function is to make it intelligible. And so for Wach, "an intellectual discipline" cannot "replace religion." The task of Religionswissenschaft is to provide an understanding of religion rather than a replacement. "It broadens and deepens the sensus numinis, the religious feeling and understanding; it prepares one for a deeper conception of one's own faith; it allows a new and comprehensive experience of what religion is and means." See Joachim Wach, Understanding and Believing, ed. and introd. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 127, 137-138.

should be permitted as a secondary source of religious knowledge. Speculation is logically speculation about or of something. The facts we obtain through observation are solid facts and speculation cannot deny their authenticity. At the same time speculation is necessary because it makes the observable fact more intelligible to us.

From this, one might assume that Saadia deals rather with the believer as such than with the methodological aspects of religious research. This is not exactly the situation. Saadia thinks that it is methodologically important for the student of religion to base his research in religion on some foundation. And because he is a human being with the need to fulfill his religious instincts, he has to start his research from something which will fulfill his religious needs and at the same time provide him with the data on which he is to base his research and speculation. Saadia holds that the person who starts his research in religion from no belief is a sinner: "We are agreed, then, on charging one who behaves in this fashion with sin, even though he be a professional thinker."[1] This opinion reflects the view of some modern students of religion who insist that the researcher in religion should have sense for religion and be a "participant engagé." W.C. Smith expresses the development of the modern situation as follows: "Seventy-five years ago it was widely held in universities that a necessary qualification for an "impartial" or scientific study of religion, including the religions of other communities, was that the student be without a faith of his own, be not engagé; at the present

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[1]p. 27.

time, the contrary view is not unfamiliar."[1]

This analysis is supported by the distinction which Saadia made between religious research and philosophical research. The methodological value of this distinction is important for understanding Saadia's insistence on the principle of commitment, and also for understanding the title Saadia gave to his book. This distinction is based on the assumption that religious research demands first "the recognition of the revealed theoretical verities and rules of conduct on the ground of tradition which the prophets established and verified by signs and miracles."[2] The task of philosophic research, then, is to investigate how these theoretical and practical verities of religion are to be verified. In this investigation, Neumark says "there [is] no difference in method between the philosopher and the religious thinker."[3] And one may add that Saadia maintains that the results obtained through both are exactly the same.

The implications here also work against the assumption that our research requires us to suspend our natural need for religious experience.[4] This will lead us to discuss the ideal of freedom from

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[1]W.C. Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither -- and Why?" in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, p. 45.

[2]David Neumark, Essays in Jewish Philosophy, ed. Samuel S. Cohon (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1971), p. 167.

[3]Ibid., p. 167. Davidson has pointed out that the appearance of the philosophic method has allowed the religious thinkers "to rethink their religion in a form more satisfactory to them, from a strictly religious viewpoint. And therefore, the Jewish thinkers in question became convinced that they had to study philosophy for purely religious reasons." Davidson, p. 55.

[4]Here, it is essential to note, as Alexander Altmann has indicated

presuppositions in Saadia's religious thought. The question, of course, is: Does the commitment of the student of religion to the data of religion provided by observation constitute any danger to the freedom from preconceptions which Saadia saw as an indispensable requisite for wisdom? Does the student of religion's commitment to his own beliefs at all threaten the principle of epôché? The answer to this question requires two points of view regarding the researcher.

First, if the researcher is studying his own religion, Saadia thinks it necessary that he base his research on personal commitment to the facts of his religion provided either by observable data or through revelation and prophecy. Now, because he is a naẓẓār, "a scholar of rational knowledge" (which Rosenblatt rendered as "professional thinker") and not just a believer, it is his duty to speculate about these data for the purpose of yaṣiḥḥu bi al fi^c^l (verification in fact) of what he has "learned . . . theoretically."[1] Since he is a believer, speculation will help him to approve or disapprove the data

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in reference to Saadia, that the "stress put on rational demonstration is not meant to devalue the simple, unsophisticated faith of the untutored." Thus the purity and simplicity of faith is maintained. See Alexander Altmann, "The Religion of the Thinkers," in Religion in a Religious Age, ed. D.S. Goitein (Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), p. 27.

[1]pp. 27-28; Al 'Amānāt, p. 22. The term "rationalization" is often used in reference to medieval philosophy of religion. By widening the study of religion and developing approaches other than the philosophical in the modern period, a much more acceptable term has become established, namely "understanding," which fulfills almost the same function as the term "rationalization." Davidson says the process of rationalization was to explain and bring to understanding "elements in the Jewish religion that were vague and problematic, and then [provide] . . . means for clarifying those problematic elements, for understanding them in a more rational way." Davidson, p. 54.

of his religion; since he is a "professional thinker," speculation will serve as a sort of epôché or suspension of his belief. He believes in his heart and practices its requirements until his reason proves the truth of his belief. In answering the question whether the sages forbade speculation because it leads to unbelief and heresy, Saadia claimed that what the sages forbade "was only to lay the books of the prophets aside and accept any private notion that might occur to an individual."[1]

Secondly, we must consider the student of a religion other than his own, where there is no question of commitment. The answer to this is clear: commitment is still necessary, although it is a different kind of commitment. For lack of a better name, we may call it "intellectual commitment."[2] It is the intellectual commitment to accept the data on which are founded the beliefs and practices of a certain religion or sect as facts observed.

To put this in technical religious language: in the first case, the "professional thinker" or academician (to use a modern term) is a committed believer whose findings must affect both the theory and practice of his religious affiliation. Davidson emphasizes the emotional side of religion which "opens up into a wide-ranging cognitive obligation, the obligation to acquire true and certain knowledge not only of the existence of God, but also as far as possible, in the nature of God." Davidson calls this religious commitment the "theory

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[1]p. 27.

[2]It may be compared to Al Birūnī's call for commitment to truth as such, as a moral commitment. (Alberuni's India, p. 5).

of philosophic love of God" which arose "from an analysis of the specifically religious obligation to love God. . . . The theory was worked out to serve a purely religious purpose to satisfy the purely religious needs of the medieval rationalist."[1] Thus, the study of philosophy and the use of the philosophical method "became necessary on religious grounds. The study of philosophy itself became a religious obligation."[2]

In the second case, the "professional thinker" is a committed theoretician who takes his findings as true theoretically or intellectually and as of value for the people whose beliefs they constitute. He is what social scientists call a "participant observer." He is the researcher who is committed to what he observes and who accepts its content as theoretically true. His search for meanings in these contents is to "verify" for himself "in fact" what he observes in terms of seeing, and to match these discovered meanings with the observed appearances and then organize them in relation to other appearances and meanings in order to reach an over-all structure for the religion under investigation. Thus, from the first case, which was given by Saadia, we can deduce the second case where the student of religion is preoccupied with subjects of research which are not affiliated to his belief. The difference between the two cases from a methodological point of view lies only in the kind of commitment which imposes itself on the researcher; otherwise, the methodological procedure and its

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[1]Davidson, pp. 61-62.

[2]Ibid., p. 64.

conclusions will be exactly the same. Above all, the epôché, on both levels, is not violated but kept intact throughout.

b. The Hermeneutical Basis of Religious Research

After establishing observation as a universal capacity available to all concerned with matters pertaining to religious knowledge, Saadia moves on to construct the hermeneutical foundation which is necessary for the student of religion in his attempt to make intelligible the facts of religion. Admitting that each science has its own method[1] which meets the requirements of its special nature, Saadia maintains that the science of religion has its own peculiarities which demand particular qualities for developing a method fitted for the study of its content. This content consists partly of observed data which can be explained empirically. However, Saadia maintains that in the sciences of religion we also encounter notions which are "neither visible nor subject to the observation of the senses."[2] These cannot be explained empirically; in describing and interpreting them a different treatment is required. In his introduction to the treatise of the creation of the world he gives a kind of warning for the student of such matters:

This treatise starts out with the preliminary observation

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[1]p. 251.

[2]p. 39. This nature of religious notions is illustrated by Van der Leeuw as follows: "Religion . . . is an ultimate experience that evades our observation, a revelation which in its very essence is, and remains, concealed. G. Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 683.

> that whoever ventures into it is seeking [light on] something that has never been beheld with human eyes nor been perceived by the senses . . . the principal object of his investigation is something so subtle and fine that the senses are unable to grasp it.[1]

He repeats the warning: "I felt it necessary to make this prefatory observation lest the reader of this book demand that I present to him a visible instance [of the creation] of something out of nothing."[2]

The example of creation is "a phenomenon that no rational being has ever personally witnessed"[3] and Saadia asks, "How can we acquiesce in anything the like of which we have never seen?"[4] His answer to this question speaks of the development of a method which, if successful, provides conclusions which we must accept as binding "for our investigation was from the very start of such a nature as to yield for us something the like of which we have not seen. We should rather welcome it and rejoice in it, since we shall thereby have attained what we have sought."[5] And "although our senses have never experienced anything like it, it is not meet for us to reject that conclusion."[6]

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[1]p. 38.

[2]p. 39.

[3]p. 38.

[4]The same question is raised by Van der Leeuw: "But how shall I deal with what is thus elusive and hidden? How can I pursue phenomenology when there is no phenomenon? How can I refer to 'phenomenology of religion' at all? . . . how shall we comprehend the life of religion merely by contemplative observation from a distance? How indeed can we understand what, in principle, wholly eludes our understanding?" Van der Leeuw, p. 683.

[5]pp. 38-39.

[6]p. 38.

In all these quotations, we see the emphasis which Saadia put upon the importance of observation and the knowledge of the senses, and his emphasis that the results which we reach about things not subject to "the knowledge of observation" must be accepted as completely as data observed once the method we adopt for them "yield[s] for us something the like of which we have not seen."[1] We must "strive to attain with our minds things distant and remote from our senses."[2] The process is a subjective, intellectual one aided by rational deduction, logical analogy and reason.[3] As explained by David Neumark in relation to Saadia's analysis of the God phenomenon, it is "an analysis of the process of sense-perception, showing that the intellectual categories have an integral function in the process."[4] Thus, seeing is a function of the soul because the soul can "subject the senses to its management"[5] and "provide the various sense organs with their sense faculties."[6] By means of the soul, people "assess accurately what they perceive with their senses and apprehend correctly the objects of their knowledge."[7] Because of this power of the soul, it is within our ability to transform every object or notion to seeing and so

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[1] p. 38.

[2] p. 38.

[3] p. 39.

[4] Neumark, p. 350.

[5] p. 110.

[6] p. 243.

[7] p. 3.

an idea can acquire the same degree of validity which we ascribe to things observed by the senses and which we subject to empirical analysis. This method, Saadia thinks, is applicable "to all systems of thought."[1] Judaism is no exception to this rule. However, it has an advantage over other systems and this is "the advantage of being in possession of miracles and marvels that have been established . . . as [trustworthy]."[2]

From the title Kitāb al 'Amānāt wa al 'I^c^tiqādāt, we can easily deduce two different methods of approaching the subject of religion, namely, the religious method and the philosophical method. These two methods vary greatly in their nature, despite the fact that they share religion as their subject matter. Saadia maintains that our treatment of religion, Judaism in his case, must give special emphasis to the religious factor, namely that Judaism is basically a religion and not a philosophy. Henry Malter says in this regard that Saadia was

> . . . the first Jewish philosopher fully conscious of the basic difference between the Jewish and philosophic conceptions of truth, and he gave especial emphasis to the fact that Judaism is primarily and essentially a religion based on historical experience; philosophic reflection being required only for the purpose of furnishing secondary evidence of the genuineness and worth of its manifold teachings. And this constitutes his undying greatness.[3]

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[1]p. 40.

[2]p. 40.

[3]Malter, p. 174. Malter, however, fails to grasp the essence of Saadia's use of the philosophical methodical doubt because he thinks of skepticism as "the generator of philosophic truth," and therefore feels that "Judaism as a positive religion could never become the bearer and promulgator of such truth." Thus, Malter characterizes Judaism as "not a system of philosophy, but a moral theology. It is not a scientific doctrine based on and developed by speculative thought. Leaving

Accordingly the quest for the understanding of Judaism must be a religious one. The religious method can locate the essential character of a certain religion; this is beyond the power of the philosophical method which is above all concerned with the verification of the content of religion rather than locating the content itself.[1]

The function of the philosophical method is not to locate the content of religion. Besides, there are many elements and characteristics of religion which also will not yield themselves to philosophical investigation; these must be treated within their religious matrix. The student of religion accepts such elements as objective data, but the student of philosophy cannot give them this status because his discipline cannot verify them; at the same time, the philosophical method cannot refute such elements.[2] This brings us to another aspect in the study of religion which requires us to let the religion dictate the method of its study. We are taught through Saadia's explanation of the scientific process of empirical research that we must start

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aside the legalistic elements, it is the immediate expression of religious feeling and emotion." It seems that Malter has confused the scientific study of Judaism, which Saadia sought, with the content of Judaism itself. While Malter thought of Judaism as not a scientific doctrine, Saadia was mainly concerned with the fact that Judaism, regardless of its nature and doctrine, scientific or not, could be studied scientifically.

[1]p. 27.

[2]Neumark considers this distinction, as given by Saadia, as constituting a "permanent difference between philosophy and religion." According to Neumark's interpretation of Saadia, "religion and philosophy have some principles in common, to wit, religion teaches the same principles which also philosophy teaches. . . . But in addition to these principles, religion may teach others which philosophy does not confirm, but is unable to refute." See Neumark, p. 167.

with the things in themselves.[1] Philosophical speculation about Judaism is but opinions formulated to further the explanation of Judaism as a religion. As such, philosophical speculation must not replace the thing it tries to explicate. This would be like making "the thing follow the opinion" which is a reverse of scientific principle. This principle is translated into concrete terms by Saadia's insistence that in studying Judaism, we should let Judaism provide for us the method applicable to it, and not deduce a philosophical principle and then apply it to Judaism. Philosophical speculation, he said, "may either hit the mark or miss it";[2] this is especially true of a methodological principle, philosophical or otherwise, unsuitably applied to the object under investigation. From the object, we should proceed to develop the method and not vice-versa. An adherence to one specific aspect of Judaism was not Saadia's intention. His was a total and comprehensive understanding of Judaism. The student of his work will notice the variety of explanations which are given by him and which reflect the special characteristics of the subject under investigation more than a reflection of a specific methodical technique. His work is full of social, cultural, psychological, philosophical, historical and theological insights and interpretations which leave no doubt in our minds that his understanding is mainly that religion and religious phenomena demand a number of interpretations to meet their various aspects and manifestations.

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[1]p. 78.

[2]p. 27.

With Saadia, the understanding of Judaism is a hermeneutical task. His categorization of Judaism is, thus, based on his efforts to establish a method of exegesis on whose principles he "undertook his adaptation of the Scriptural text to the requirements of philosophy and logic."[1] He believed that the solution for many of the problems of religion lies in the understanding of the language and the right interpretation of its content. As Richard P. McKeon has indicated, Saadia, being a philologist,

> . . . found, like modern philosophers who have turned to semantics, that the solution of many philosophic problems depends on the interpretation of words. His analysis [was] concerned, however, with the examination of how men have in fact expressed themselves, not with the formal construction of languages; and he refused, unlike many of his predecessors, to find the solution of all problems in the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, without going to the other extreme, unlike many modern logicians, of seeking scientific explanations by the simple expedient of giving every word a fixed literal meaning and designation.[2]

In his method of exegesis, Saadia introduced psychological analysis mainly through his "examination of how men have expressed themselves,"[3] rather than deal rigorously with the construction of language. His analyses are in the form of inquiry into the minds of the men from whom we received the content of religion.

This understanding agrees with Jacob Neusner's opinion that the history of religion as the study of tradition must "be subsumed under,

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[1]A.S. Halkin, "Saadia's Exegesis and Polemics," in Rab Saadia Gaon: Studies in His Honour, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1944), p. 125.

[2]Richard P. McKeon, "Saadia Gaon," in Rab Saadia Gaon, p. 105.

[3]Ibid., p. 105.

even reduced to, its significance in the interpretation of the mind and self-understanding of a given religious community or society."[1] The "mode of being in the world," to use one of Eliade's favorite expressions, is necessary for the understanding of the meanings of religious ideas. Saadia's hermeneutical endeavor was essentially oriented towards the revival and the reliving of the existential situations of past generations of Jews. This could be done only by the continuous effort to purify belief and to return with Judaism to its central concept, which had been obscured in Saadia's day by the modifications introduced in the course of time and the ambiguities of the various systems of thought that surrounded the cultural environment of Judaism.

The historian of religions is thus understood by Saadia as one whose function is to transmit historical accounts of religious import in a way which make them look as reliable and as vibrant as they were for the early generations. Religious tradition "requires transmitters (nāqilīn), in order that these matters [may] seem as authentic to posterity as they did to early ancestors."[2] The human mind itself is rendered "susceptible to the acceptance of authenticated tradition (al Khabar al Ṣādiq), and the human soul is made capable of finding repose therein."[3] We may understand the historian of religions as a

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[1]Jacob Neusner, "The Study of Religion as the Study of Tradition: Judaism," in History of Religions, Vol. 14, No. 3 (February, 1975) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), p. 206.

[2]p. 155. Al 'Amānāt, p. 126.

[3]p. 156. Al 'Amānāt, p. 126.

"transmitter" of the religious tradition of the past. He tries through his analysis of historico-religious data to represent the past for present generations. Kristensen agrees with Saadia on this task as he claims that understanding the historical past "is a form of re-presentation."[1] This requires "a kind of entrance into the 'life' of a religious community and its history."[2]

In the use of interpretation, Saadia warns against rigidly applying specific meanings to words. Some might think this would make the hermeneutical endeavor easier, and he imagines someone asking "'But what advantage is there in this extension of meaning that is practices by language and that is calculated only to throw us into doubt? Would it not have done better if it had restricted itself to expressions of unequivocal meaning and thus have enabled us to dispense with this burden of discovering the correct interpretation?'"[3] Saadia answers by pointing to the richness of religious language and its openness to more than one meaning; fixing the meaning would stifle the tremendous religious feelings, spirituality and symbolism which are major characteristics of the language of religion. Thus he says,

> . . . if language were to restrict itself to just one term, its employment would be very much curtailed and it would be impossible to express by means of it any more than a small portion of what we aim to convey. It therefore preferred

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[1]W.B. Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p. 7.

[2]Allie M. Frazier, "Models for a Methodology of Religious Meaning," Bucknell Review, XVIII, No. 3 (1970), p. 22.

[3]pp. 117-118.

> rather to extend its use of words so as to transmit every meaning.[1]

Saadia claims that in doing so we will not miss the right interpretation because we already have two criteria through which we can detect what is hermeneutically right or wrong. These are reason and history.

Reason can distinguish interpretations produced by the application of the rules of reason from those which evidently do not follow these rules. History and familiarity with the language of the Scriptures can also tell whether this or that interpretation is rational and thus true or not. For the correct interpretation we must rely "upon reason and acquaintance with the texts of Scripture and with history (al 'āthār)."[2] This method has serious implications for the understanding of the essential meanings of religious language and symbolism. This is implied in Saadia's statement: "unless there existed the possibility of an extension of meaning in language, nothing more than the barest reference to substances would have been within its competence."[3]

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[1]p. 118. Another justification of this theory of the "extension of meaning in language" is seen when we have grasped in our minds a concept which cannot be expressed by a single term. In interpreting God's attributes of vitality, omnipotence and omniscience, Saadia maintains that "although these three attributes are grasped by our minds at one blow, our tongues are unable to convey them with one word, since we do not find in language an expression that would embrace these three connotations. We are, therefore, compelled to employ in designating them three expressions, after remarking, by way of explanation, that the mind has recognized them simultaneously. . . . All these attributes are rather implied in His being a Creator. It was only our need to transmit it that impelled us to formulate this concept in three expressions, since we did not find in existing speech an expression that would embrace all of the ideas." pp. 101-102.

[2]p. 118. Al 'Amānāt, p. 97.

[3]pp. 196-197.

In the case of the terminology used in regard to the concept of Godhead, our reason and our historical experience certify that if, when talking of God, we made use "only of expressions that are literally true, it would be necessary for us to desist from speaking of Him as one that hears and sees and pities and wills to the point where there would be nothing left for us to affirm except the fact of His existence."[1] Van der Leeuw objects to such fixation of the language of religion:

> . . . it is at bottom utterly impossible contemplatively to confront an event which, on the one hand, is an ultimate experience, and on the other hand manifests itself in profound emotional agitation, in the attitude of such pure intellectual restraint. Apart from the existential attitude that is concerned with reality, we could never know anything of either religion or faith.[2]

Literal and abstract notions about religion do not leave room for reason to widen and enrich the human imagination and creativity in the realm of religion. Thus, the task of hermeneutics is to enlarge the possibilities that are open for human understanding of religious forms and symbols. Hermeneutics is the rational interpretation of religion without any distortion of the richness of the language by fixing it to specific meanings. Hermeneutics keeps the content of revelation open for human insight. A similar understanding of the nature of religious hermeneutics is expressed in the following words of G. Van der Leeuw:

> The religious significance of things . . . is that on which no wider nor deeper meaning whatever can follow. It is the

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[1] p. 118.

[2] Van der Leeuw, p. 683.

> meaning of the whole: it is the last word. But this meaning is never understood, this last word is never spoken; always they remain superior, the ultimate meaning being a secret which reveals itself repeatedly, only nevertheless to remain eternally concealed. It implies an advance to the furthest boundary, where only the sole fact is understood: that all comprehension is "beyond"; and thus the ultimate meaning is at the same moment the limit of meaning.[1]

One other task of hermeneutics in religion is to found bases for the content of religion on knowledge provided by sensory perception. Hermeneutics is the connection between Saadia's theory of cognition (rooted in observation) and the analysis of religious knowledge. Through the hermeneutical process the manifestations of the knowledge of religion are subjected to analysis which transforms religious precepts into visible data apt for description. According to Saadia, the literal interpretation of religious knowledge is admitted unless it runs counter to what is known through sensory perception.[2] He states this principle in relation to the language of the Scriptures: "Those who interpret the verses of Sacred Writ allegorically fall into four categories. They may do so either to (a) harmonize a verse with the evidence of the senses, or (b) with the testimony of reason, or (c) with other Biblical passages, or (d) with tradition."[3] As we know from previous quotations, the knowledge provided by reason and through tradition have their basis in the knowledge of "direct observation," and so the hermeneutics of Saadia is nothing but an empirical rendering

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[1]G. Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology, Vol. II (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 680.

[2]p. 265.

[3]pp. 231-232.

of religious knowledge to the point where it can be studied as seen phenomena.

In the language of modern phenomenology, this process is illustrated by Van der Leeuw:

> We can . . . observe religion as intelligible experience; or we can concede to it the status of incomprehensible revelation. For in its "reconstruction," experience is a phenomenon. Revelation is not; but man's reply to revelation, his assertion about what has been revealed, is also a phenomenon from which, indirectly, conclusions concerning the revelation itself can be derived (per viam negationis).[1]

Elaborating on these two ways of understanding religion, Van der Leeuw calls the first the "horizontal path" which is "not a tangible, but is all the more an intelligible, phenomenon." The "vertical way" is not "a phenomenon at all, and is neither attainable nor understandable; what we obtain for it phenomenologically, therefore, is merely its reflection in experience. We can never understand God's utterance by means of any purely intellectual capacity: what we can understand is our own answer; and in this sense, too, it is true that we have the treasure only in an earthen vessel."[2] Experience for Van der Leeuw and history for Saadia are the criteria for accepting the reality of religious phenomena. Van der Leeuw is often criticized for not being interested in the history of religious structures, something which Saadia could not dispense with. He introduced the concept of tradition in order to see the movement of the religious system in history. His hermeneutical principle of the extension of language is an

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[1]Van der Leeuw, p. 679.

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 680-681.

acknowledgement of the historical conditioning of religious expressions and this principle was meant to open the door for the ever-renewed effort of interpretation responding to the ever-changing conditions of religious life. The importance of history is associated, for Saadia, with the element of experience. Historical experience validates the phenomenon and secures its place within the tradition.

c. The Religio-Historical Method: The Methodological Implications of Authentic Tradition (al Khabar al Ṣādiq)

Problems of history in the Jewish religion cannot be solved by the mere application of the philosophical method. These problems are essential for understanding the content of the Jewish religion. If rational explanation fails in the interpretation of these historical elements we should not be discouraged; the religious method itself should provide the answer. Here, Saadia introduces his most important concept: authentic tradition.

Authentic tradition (Khabar Ṣādiq) serves two functions. First of all, it is one of the sources of religious knowledge. Saadia distinguishes three sources of knowledge in general, but he adds a fourth source for religious knowledge. The first source of knowledge "consists of the knowledge gained by [direct] observation (ᶜilm al shāhid)"[1] and that is "whatever a person perceives by means of the five senses."[2] The second source "is composed of the intuition of the intellect (ᶜilm

[1] p. 16.

[2] p. 16.

al ^c^aql),"[1] and for Saadia this is defined as "such notions as spring up solely in the mind of a human being, such as approbation of truthfulness and disapproval of mendacity."[2] The third source "comprises that knowledge which is inferred by logical necessity"[3] which means "conclusions." This source is defined by Saadia in the following:

> . . . whenever our senses perceive anything the existence of which has been verified, and [the belief in the reality of] that thing can be upheld in our minds only by virtue of the simultaneous acknowledgement [of the reality] of other things, then we must acknowledge the existence of all of them, be they few or many in number, since the validity of the sense perception in question is maintained only by them.[4]

These three sources are logically interdependent so that the denial of one implies the denial of all. The conclusions reached, if not "accepted by the individual as true, would compel his denial of his rational intuitions or the perception of his senses. Since . . . he cannot very well negate either of these two, he must regard the said inference as being correct." An illustration is given as follows:

> Thus we are forced to affirm, although we have never seen it, that man possesses a soul, in order not to deny its manifest activity. [We must] also [agree], although we have never seen it, that every soul is endowed with reason, [merely] in order not to deny the latter's manifest activity (fi^c^luhu al ẓāhir).[5]

For religious knowledge Saadia adds a fourth source which he

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[1]p. 16. Al 'Amānāt, p. 13.

[2]p. 16. Elsewhere, it is defined as "anything that is conceived in our mind in complete freedom from accidents." p. 20.

[3]p. 16.

[4]p. 21.

[5]p. 17. Al 'Amānāt, p. 13.

considers as being available only to "the community of monotheists."[1] This is <u>ᶜilm al Khabar al Sādiq</u> (authentic tradition), which is based on the three other sources.[2] This is a valid source of knowledge because "it is based upon the knowledge of the senses as well as that of reason."[3] In all these four sources, we should notice Saadia's emphasis on sensory perception as the primary basis for all knowledge.

The second function of authentic tradition is purely methodological. Its methodological function has two related aspects. Authentic tradition, consisting of Jewish history and experience, verifies the knowledge acquired through the other three sources of knowledge because it considers the historical events from which the other three sources of knowledge spring: "this type of knowledge . . . which is furnished by authentic tradition and the books of prophetic revelation . . . corroborates for us the validity of the first three sources of knowledge."[4] Authentic tradition not only acknowledges the senses but adds two more functions to them -- "motion (through which we experience "consciousness of heaviness and lightness"),[5] and "speech."[6] Authentic tradition verifies also the validity of the intuition of reason through the injunction "to speak the truth and not to

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[1]p. 18.

[2]p. 18. <u>Al 'Amānāt</u>, p. 14.

[3]p. 18.

[4]p. 18.

[5]Based on <u>Ps</u>. 115:5-7.

[6]p. 18.

lie."[1] It also "confirms . . . the validity of knowledge inferred by logical necessity, [that is to say] that whatever leads to the rejection of the perception of the senses or rational intuition is false."[2] Finally, authentic tradition "informs us that all sciences are [ultimately] based on what we grasp with our aforementioned senses, from which they are deduced and derived."[3]

Thus, authentic tradition provides us with a criterion for verifying religious data. It allows us to see them as empirical phenomena because they are rooted in our power of perception; this transforms these data from merely theoretical notions into experienced phenomena rooted in our historical consciousness. One of the historical examples which Saadia uses to illustrate this point is the miracle of the manna.

> Now it is not likely that the forebears of the children of Israel should have been in agreement upon this matter if they had considered a lie. Such [proof] suffices, then, as the requisite of every authentic tradition. Besides, if they had told their children: "We lived in the wilderness for forty years eating naught except manna," and there had been no basis for that in fact, their children would have answered them: "Now you are telling us a lie. Then, so and so, is not this thy field, and thou, so and so, is not this thy garden from which you have always your sustenance?" This is, then, something that the children would not have accepted by any manner of means.[4]

This is the main methodological point of Saadia's dictum that "authentic tradition is as trustworthy as things perceived with our own

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[1] p. 19. Based on Prov. 8:7,8.

[2] p. 19. Based on Job 18:4 and 24:25.

[3] p. 19. Based on Job 34:2,3.

[4] p. 30.

eyes."[1] The only possibility for doubting the truthfulness of a reported phenomenon is when direct observation is impossible. According to Saadia, "a report is subject to falsification in two directions from which direct observation is immune. It may be due either to false impression (al ẓann) or else to deliberate misrepresentation (ṭarīq al taᶜammud)."[2]

Before we discuss the second methodological aspect of authentic tradition, we may question how authentic tradition itself is validated. Saadia's first criterion of validity is implicit in the identification of authentic tradition with sensory perception. In Judaism especially Saadia emphasizes that the validity of authentic tradition is assured because of the participation of the whole Jewish community. The testimony of a large community is taken for proof of authenticity, for

> . . . only the individual . . . is subject to and fooled by false impression or deliberate deception. In the case of a large community of men, however, it is not likely that all of its constituents should have been subject to the same wrong impressions. On the other hand, had there been a deliberate conspiracy to create a fictitious tradition, that fact could not have remained a secret to the masses, but wherever the tradition had been published, the report of the conspiracy would have been published along with it.[3]

Another criterion for the validity of tradition is psychological. Saadia expresses it thus:

> Were it not for the fact that men felt satisfied in their hearts that there is such a thing in the world as authentic tradition, no person would be able to cherish legitimate expectations on the basis of the reports he receives about the success of a

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[1]p. 157.

[2]p. 157. Al 'Amānāt, p. 127.

[3]p. 157.

> certain commercial transaction, or the usefulness of a specified art -- and, after all, the realization of man's potentialities and the satisfaction of his needs depend upon enterprise. Nor would he heed the warnings about the dangers of a certain road, or the announcement of the prohibition of a certain act. [However] without such expectations and apprehensions he would fail in his undertakings.[1]

Saadia takes such examples from daily experience as direct observed proofs of the validity of tradition.[2] Unless the validity of such tradition were accepted, Saadia thinks that "the affairs of men would always be subject to doubt, to the point where human beings would believe only what they perceive with their senses at the time of perception."[3] This is tantamount to skepticism[4] and renders all knowledge, especially that of the past, impossible. The knowledge of religion would be no exception. Like all knowledge, it requires "transmitters" in the course of time "in order that these matters [may] seem as authentic to posterity as they did to the early ancestors."[5] Likewise, Jacob Neusner defines tradition as "something handed on from

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[1]p. 156.

[2]Saadia continues to furnish other examples of the validity of authentic tradition from existing phenomena in our historical experience. He mentions among other things that if there were no authentic tradition "men would accept neither the command nor the interdict of their ruler, except when they saw him with their own eyes and heard his words with their own ears. In the event of his absence, however, the acceptance on their part of his command and interdict would cease. But if things were like that, it would mean the end of law and order, and the death of many human beings." Without authentic tradition, "no man would be able to identify the property of his father . . . he would not even be certain of being the son of his mother, let alone of his being the son of his father." p. 156.

[3]p. 156.

[4]p. 156.

[5]p. 155.

the past which is made contemporary and transmitted because of its intense contemporaneity."[1]

From the above discussion, we can deduce the second methodological aspect of authentic tradition, in Saadia's exposition. Since authentic tradition cannot be challenged by any means, it takes priority over all different aspects of religion taken separately. Thus Saadia appears to suggest that the best way to study religion is to consider it as tradition, an approach which has been suggested by some recent historians of religions, especially Jacob Neusner for Judaism. Saadia considers tradition as an over-arching system in which the development of the Jewish religion is seen in its historical perspective. Seen as tradition, religion is not static or limited to a particular period in history. For that reason, tradition as a source for Judaism takes priority over the Scriptures themselves, which are seen as the <u>product</u> of the Jewish experience, and thus as <u>part</u> of the Jewish tradition. In many cases, Saadia refers to tradition as the touchstone of reality. In reference to the status of tradition in relation to the Bible, he states:

> I say . . . that there may be some men who would give up their adherence to the Bible because many of the commandments are not clearly explained in it. My answer to them is that the Bible is not the sole basis of our religion, for in addition to it we have two other bases. One of these is anterior to it, namely, the fountain of reason. The second is posterior to it, namely, the source of tradition. Whatever, therefore, we may not find in the Bible, we can find in the two

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[1]Jacob Neusner, "The Study of Religion as the Study of Tradition: Judaism," <u>History of Religions</u>, Vol. 14, No. 2 (February, 1975).

> other sources. Thus are the commandments rounded out quantitatively as well as qualitatively.[1]

Elsewhere he says that whatever is recorded in the Scriptures must be accepted "in its literal sense and its universally recognized meaning"[2] unless it conflicts "with what has been transmitted by tradition,"[3] or "the observation of the senses,"[4] or the dictates of reason, or other "Scriptural utterance."[5] He adds, ". . . any Biblical statement to the meaning of which rabbinic tradition has attached a certain reservation is to be interpreted by us in keeping with this authentic tradition."[6] Tradition, which reflects experience and practice, is preferred to the "consequences of haughtiness and the love of dominion"[7] among men. Whoever falls for this "rejects what the elders have learned by experience and excludes what practice has taught them to be right, and does not accept their advice and recommendations."[8]

Thus, tradition is established as a criterion of truth[9] in

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[1]pp. 173-174.

[2]p. 415.

[3]p. 415.

[4]p. 415.

[5]p. 415.

[6]p. 266. The laws which proceed from authentic tradition are of eternal validity and they cannot be abrogated by other laws from other traditions. These laws are, thus, not subject to the changes that are brought about "either by the natural constitution of the subjects or by habit." p. 161.

[7]p. 388.

[8]p. 388.

[9]Altmann confirms here that "The ultimate criterion of the

whose light all aspects of religion are to be understood. Tradition unites all aspects of the study of religion and sets them in their necessary historical context. Tradition also satisfies the religious needs of men, which change in time. Tradition connects the religious experiences of past ages with those of the present. It may, perhaps, even venture into the future because future experiences are shaped by those of the past. A tradition functions as a means of standardizing religious beliefs. It is generally understood, according to Saadia, that the person "who transmits (al nāqil) a tradition must make the same assertion on every [succeeding] day that he made the day before. He is not like the person who expresses his own opinion and who is permitted to say, 'I have discovered today what I could not understand yesterday.'"[1] It is through a transmitted tradition which has the sanction of all, rather than through a personal view, that all aspects of religion can be seen as a whole.

Saadia's understanding of tradition reflects his understanding of knowledge as a gradual process. The knowledge of religion is also gradual and it does not acquire its final shape unless it is viewed within the larger context of tradition. This shows the importance of history in making religion intelligible and a living reality; it cannot be approached as a phenomenon isolated from other contexts. Saadia

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legitimacy of a doctrine in Islamic as well as in Jewish Kalām lies not in pure reason but in tradition (khabar). By establishing 'true tradition' (Khabar sādiq) as an independent source of knowledge Saadia not only validated undemonstrated belief (taqlīd), he also thereby circumscribed the areas of belif to be verified by the rational method." See Altmann, p. 27.

[1] p. 172.

admits that the best way of understanding Judaism is to approach it primarily as a religion, but by setting religion within the larger concept of tradition he allows other approaches to be applied in fathoming the phenomenon of religion. Saadia himself used philosophical and psychological insights in interpreting the Jewish religion as well as social, political and administrative insights. Even "physical science" could help in explaining the science of religion as we see in the following passage:

> Exclusive preoccupation with physical science would constitute an abandonment of the cultivation of the science of religion and religious law (hikmat al dīn wa al Sharīᶜah), whereas the only reason why the love of the former has been implanted in man is in order that it might support the latter, both together making an excellent combination.[1]

From Saadia's analysis of the concept of authentic tradition, it seems that certain limitations are imposed on the value of the epôché as a universal methodological tool applied to all sources of knowledge. Like the self, the one reality we are sure of, authentic tradition stands as a reality beyond doubt, at least in its totality. Equating authentic tradition with knowledge of direct observation leaves nothing to be suspended. One might venture to say that authentic tradition functions as a substitution for the subject of the phenomenologist. The epôché is deemed necessary only in the case of individuals trying with their own efforts to know, and because of fear of illusions, presuppositions and prejudices, the epôché is obligatory. But once a phenomenon is seen and observed by a multitude of people and

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[1]p. 394. Al 'Amānāt, p. 310.

thus acquires the status of tradition, it stands above criticism.

Thus, the object and the subject of the phenomenologist receive a new dimension in Saadia's thought when it comes to religious knowledge. Distinguished from all other sorts of knowledge, religious knowledge is not the work of one person, and thus the tradition as a whole is the touchstone of reality against which the knowledge provided by an individual person is tested. What we may call radical knowledge in other areas is tantamount to discontinuity in the tradition of that special sort of knowledge. Religious knowledge enjoys a continuity without which it would lack meaning, and it is therefore essential to locate the personal intellectual effort of the individual within the stream of the tradition of that knowledge. This is to say that while a new start is always possible in some kinds of knowledge -- the natural sciences for example -- it is impossible in religious knowledge. This does not imply a rejection of the _epôché_ because the subject here is subjected to two criteria of verification in the movement from knowledge-as-such to religious knowledge. Firstly, as a knowing subject, the thinker's faculty of cognition is subjected to the phenomenological process described earlier including the _epôché_. Secondly, in the realm of religious knowledge, tradition provides a sort of a collective _epôché_ of the individual's effort. The subject is absorbed into the collective experience of the tradition and so his testimony as an individual is invalid unless it is accepted by the tradition. In other words, the tradition suspends the subject's intellectual effort in religious matters until it is located within the tradition itself; otherwise his intellectual effort will be rejected.

In this manner, not only is the continuity of the tradition preserved, but also the continuity of the movement from knowledge-as-such to religious knowledge, both being based and founded on sensory perception.

4. The Comprehensive Understanding of Religion as a Tradition: The Case of Judaism

As we saw earlier, Saadia's concern to establish the religion of Judaism on a solid foundation of reason led him to establish first a solid foundation for reason itself by undertaking a critical investigation of cognition -- its roots, and the process it takes in becoming certain knowledge beyond any possibility of doubt. Thus, Saadia's task was twofold, and his success on both fronts was equally great. As a philosopher, says Neumark, Saadia succeeded in building up "a system new in its principles and important in its contribution to the general advancement of human thought."[1] Through his influence on all later Jewish philosophers, Saadia left a permanent impact upon scholastic philosophy and the Renaissance and thus on the development of critical philosophy in general.[2] As to his concern with the interpretation and systematization of the Jewish religion, Neumark remarks that Saadia, in this regard, "has the merit of having established the method."[3]

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[1]Neumark, p. 174.

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 174, 351.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 174.

a. The Systematic Urge: Causes and Motives

Before discussing this method, it is relevant to speak of the motives which prompted Saadia to develop the system of Judaism which has since become a pattern for all attempts to systematize Judaism. Two of these motives are mentioned directly by Saadia; others can be deduced from his intellectual attitude, or from the religious *Weltanschauung* of his time which left its impact upon his thought. The first two motives are mentioned by Saadia in the following manner: "We inquire into and speculate about the matters of our religion with two objectives in mind. One of these is to have verified in fact what we have learned from the prophets of God theoretically. The second is to refute him who argues against us in regard to anything pertaining to our religion."[1] The purpose of systematization, then, is to provide an understanding of the theoretical content of revelation and prophecy in Judaism. This is done by providing an intellectual expression of the Jewish religious experience, given through prophecy, and kept intact through authentic tradition and the practical experience of generations of Jews. The second motif is of course apologetic -- to defend the Jewish faith and define its place among other faiths and systems.

Generally, Joachim Wach sees these two motives as reflections of "a desire for coherence" or a "systematic urge"[2] which one sees in all aspects of Saadia's thought. Wach lists three functions of the

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[1]pp. 27-28.

[2]Wach, The Comparative Study of Religion, p. 68.

systematic arrangement of doctrine; one of these is the apologetic function -- "the defense of the faith and the definition of its relation to other knowledge (apologetics)."[1] The other two functions of the systematic arrangement of doctrine apply perfectly to Saadia's intention and his inclination to put the bulk of the Jewish experience into a coherent system. Saadia's systematic structure was designed to provide a whole-meaning to the various Jewish precepts by treating them in relation to each other and to make them revolve around a specific center. These two functions are described by Wach as: "the explication and articulation of faith,"[2] and, "the normative regulation of life in worship and service."[3] While the former was a mark of Saadia's work both in the philosophic and the religious realms, the latter was his ultimate goal. We mentioned earlier his desire that his people would conduct their daily affairs according to the teachings of the sciences, including the religious sciences,[4] and his desire to bring about a "harmonious blend" of all man's activities;[5] this he considers as normative human conduct, resulting from "subjecting the affairs of the world to analysis."[6]

In addition to the "systematic urge," Saadia was eager to preserve the purity of religion in the face of various alien doctrines.

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[1]Wach, p. 68.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 68.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 68.

[4]p. 77.

[5]p. 404.

[6]p. 407.

The aim of Al 'Amanat wa al 'I^c tiqādāt was originally to guide his contemporaries toward the pure form of religion and to end their confusion and wavering between blind faith and arrogant unbelief. By following his guidelines, men will

> . . . improve their inner being as well as in their outer conduct. Their prayer, too, will become pure, since they will have acquired in their hearts a deterrent from error, an impulse to do what is right . . . their beliefs [will] prevail in their affairs . . . [and] they will all tend toward the realm of wisdom and feel no inclination for anything else.[1]

Elsewhere, Saadia declares his dissatisfaction over the state of belief of his time: "I saw in this age of mine many believers whose belief was not pure and whose convictions were not sound."[2] Wach, in his analysis of the intellectual expressions of religious experience, has called this factor "the desire for the preservation of the purity of "insight."[3] The "curiosity" or "the desire to fill in,"[4] the "challenge of the situation,"[5] and the "sociological conditions, especially the existence of a center or seat of authority,"[6] are all factors mentioned by Wach which apply to Saadia's case and which were responsible for the rise of his systematic explication of Judaism, the establishment of its normative form and his struggle against deviation from

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[1]p. 9.

[2]p. 7.

[3]Wach, p. 68.

[4]Ibid., p. 68.

[5]Ibid., p. 68.

[6]Ibid., p. 68.

this norm.

b. Saadia's Empirical Rationalism and Systematization as a Tool of Understanding

This tendency toward systematization was, in Saadia's case, produced by strong rationalism bound up with a search after meanings. The hermeneutical structure of Judaism was his means of providing the desired meanings. Without it, his system itself would not be intelligible. More than trying to reconcile faith to reason, Saadia's main concern was to build up a solid system, hermeneutically based, for the better understanding of Judaism and its precepts. Rather than calling his work a justification of faith, it is to his credit that we should see it as a systematization of Jewish beliefs which provides apt categories to fit their content and renders them more understandable to both the "professional thinker" and the ordinary believer. It is to Saadia's credit, too, that he was the first in Jewish thought to provide such a structure.

Heschel seems to be critical of Saadia's work on the grounds that Saadia's conception of belief "makes it difficult to understand why faith is regarded as a cardinal religious virtue."[1] The difficulty here arises mainly because Heschel treats Saadia's conception as merely an attempt to justify faith by reason; in doing this, Heschel finds that "there was no room left for faith."[2] But if we try to understand Saadia's work within the light of modern scholarship in the study of

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[1]Heschel, p. 405.

[2]Ibid., p. 405.

religion, the dichotomy of faith and reason will not be a workable criterion for the best interpretation of Saadia. Heschel appears to consider that the very systematization of belief implies a loss of faith:

> Faith is not a theoretical act based on a logical conclusion. It does not originate in the critical mind and is neither dependent on proof nor impaired by vagueness. Sometimes faith uses rational terms when it is to be expressed as a creed. But these terms are only a varnish and do not penetrate its essence. The believing man is usually indifferent to the origin or foundations of his faith. He often shuns demonstrations or perception of what is hidden from the natural eye and prefers the loyalty of faith to the clarity of knowledge.[1]

Although Heschel acknowledges that Saadia's use of the term "belief" is basically epistemological, it is that same understanding of belief which destroys for Heschel the essence of faith. Faith must not be totally subjected to conceptualization and thus to systematization: "Formulated belief is an attempt to translate into words an unutterable spiritual reality . . . any attempt to vindicate belief does not deal with the original reality but with the translation; it tries to integrate an imitation into the system of original logical symbols."[2] We may say here that it is usually not reality as such that is to be structured, but it is rather the manifestations of that reality. Saadia would agree with Heschel in maintaining that spiritual reality is beyond description and thus cannot be formulated into a structural system, but the manifestations of that reality do yield to description and structuralization. Through the systematic arrangement

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[1]Heschel, pp. 407-408.

[2]Ibid., p. 408.

of these manifestations, a modest understanding of reality may become accessible. However, Saadia was not just interested in systematization. His phenomenological analysis dealt mainly with the reality that is hidden in manifestations. The structure of religion is the task of a systematic science but the discovery of reality is the work of the phenomenological mind whose task is to reach "inner being," a state of pure clarity in which the reality of things in themselves becomes apparent.

As we have repeatedly indicated, Saadia's thought, religious or otherwise, is based completely on his critique of reason and the rational faculties of the soul. The theory of knowledge that was produced was meant to be considered as the basis of all knowledge. Religious knowledge as part of Wisdom (which covers all aspects of our life) is no different from any other kind of knowledge. And if one kind of knowledge can be scientifically based on a unified method, then religious knowledge must also follow that method. This is what Saadia tried to show in his epistemological definition of belief, for it meant above all that the question of religion is a question of epistemology and any understanding of religion should take this principle as its starting point. For this reason Salo Baron is absolutely right in calling Saadia "an epistemological dogmatist."[1] Saadia applies this understanding even to mystical knowledge. As Alexander Altmann has pointed out, Saadia, among other thinkers of the Geonic period, tried to give a "rational connotation" to mysticism. Altmann maintains that

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[1]Salo Baron, p. 80.

Saadia's Commentary on the Sefer Yeṣira "tends to minimize the mystical import of the combinations of letters and the Divine names." Most important is Altmann's statement that "there is no difference between the Yeṣira commentary and the 'Amānāt as far as epistemology is concerned. Both treatises describe the process of cognition as comprising three stages that culminate in an act of belief (i^{c}tiqād) free from doubt."[1]

This understanding would not only fathom the mysteries of religion and render it intelligible to us, but would also help unite the religious aspect with the other aspects of our life and thus the scientific method would become our way of life. Saadia based his theory of knowledge on sensory perception, and (as we demonstrated earlier in our discussion) based religious knowledge on the sensory perception of revelation whose manifestations could be systematized. The Arabic term naẓar used by Saadia and the Hebrew rendering of it עיון meant exactly this. Although it is usually rendered in English as philosophical "speculation," naẓar originally means "seeing" in the phenomenological sense of the term. And it is here that Heschel's criticism falls short. While he rightly observed that the term naẓar "signifies the method" by which Saadia tried "to test and to confirm the teachings of religion," he restricted his understanding of the term to its classical meaning, as a counterpart of the term faith or revelation.

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[1]Alexander Altmann, "The Religion of the Thinkers: Free Will and Predestination in Saadia, Bahya, and Maimonides," in Religion in a Religious Age, Proceedings of Regional Conferences held at the University of California, Los Angeles and Brandeis University in April, 1973, ed. S.D. Goitein (Association for Jewish Studies, Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 26-27.

According to his analysis Saadia "insists on nothing so strongly as on the application of this method [of naẓar], which is a process of arranging and comparing the reasons for and against a proposition. The reasons offered by the rational faculty of man, the sum of all judgments, are taken from science and philosophy. Saadia's task was to prove that the teachings of Judaism are consistent with the laws of nature and even postulated by philosophy."[1] Heschel then criticizes science and philosophy in the following manner:

> However, the views of science and philosophy are subject to change in the development of thought, and speculation is not always free from hidden bias, predilection and logical habits. We can well understand why there was opposotion to the recognition of speculation as the supreme judge over matters of faith.[2]

Although Saadia was quite aware of the limits of science and philosophy and of the pitfalls of natural thinking, this conception of naẓar did not imply the contrast between reason and faith, but rather signified a methodological device for the preservation of objects of knowledge as seen phenomena. In his philosophical phenomenology and in his phenomenology of religion the meaning of the term was the same; it kept on all levels the phenomenological and epistemological quality which marks its methodological value. The establishment of the "knowledge acquired through observation" as the element of validation for all sources of knowledge, and its identification with authentic tradition on the religious level, is significant insofar as it makes from "seeing," in the phenomenological sense, the foundation of religious

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[1]Heschel, pp. 405-406.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 406.

knowledge itself. According to this understanding, even the ordinary person can base his belief on an empirical factor which is within his reach. Heschel, however, has a natural tendency towards mysticism, and this appears to have influenced his analysis and criticism of Saadia's empirical rationalism. Some of his statements are good examples of that mystical orientation which is not reflected in Saadia's thought. In his criticism of Saadia, Heschel asserts,

> It is impossible to render the essentials of faith in abstract notions, nor can its truth be proved by logical arguments. Its demonstration would mean its frustration. Its certainty is intuitive, not speculative. Many of its elements can neither be tested nor verified. A comparison of faith with reason does not enhance either of the two but reduces one of them. There are many phenomena that cannot be measured with abstract knowledge, as, for example, man's relation to art or beauty. Even less can faith be evaluated in terms of reason.[1]

Saadia, of course, does not reject intuition as either a source of knowledge or as an indication of the certainty of faith. For him, however, intuition is not understood in the mystical sense of Heschel, but rather as a source of knowledge and faith which is as empirical as all other sources. Its validity is measured by the degree to which it reflects what appears and by its correspondence to the real observable conditions of its object. Its results are evaluated by knowledge acquired through observation, and in the religious realm, it is proved or disproved by authentic tradition[2] which exemplifies historical experience. If intuition falls short of fulfilling these conditions, it is not trustworthy as a source of knowledge. Besides,

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[1]Heschel, p. 407.

[2]pp. 18-19.

intuition in Heschel's mystical sense is not within reach of the common man. Therefore Heschel's intuition fails to fulfill the conditions set up by Saadia when he established knowledge acquired through observation as a source of knowledge accessible to every man. The validity of knowledge acquired through observation is, moreover, much more trustworthy than that of the mystic's intuition, which is not empirically gounded in observation. Saadia and Heschel share a vigorous quest for certainty, but they take different paths. Heschel bases his quest on the intuitive and the mystical, while Saadia approaches the quest through the scientific spirit, realism, and rational empiricism. To interpret Saadia in terms other than these is certainly to misinterpret him.

c. <u>The Logic of Religion: The Internal Structural Coherence of Judaism</u>

Authentic tradition does not by itself provide a structure for religious knowledge. The knowledge it offers is cumulative and disorganized. Before Saadia, there were some attempts to organize and explain the content of Judaism, but these were essentially interpretive. Most scholars of Judaism consider Saadia the first to give a systematic presentation of Judaism. Saadia spared no effort in making use of data taken from tradition to give his system a structure which proceeds from within the teachings of Judaism. He also used other systems familier to him either for comparison or to define Judaism's relation to them.

Saadia's task was to systematize the disorganized accumulated content of authentic tradition, but this task could not take place in a

vacuum. It must be related to community practices, which express the most important elements of authentic tradition as empirical realities. Saadia's structural attempt gives a clear conceptual definition to these realities and defines the relation between them hermeneutically.

This hermeneutical task involved two main features: one was to structure the content of Judaism according to rational and logical principles and the other to utilize a multi-dimensional interpretation of religious phenomena. Besides the normative, theological and philosophical explanations, Saadia used sociological and psychological analysis of the individual Jew and his community. This he did with an awareness of the historical contexts which he considered essential for interpreting a religion as bound up with history as the Jewish religion. Saadia always turned to history in order to document his rational explanation of the content of Judaism. Each treatise was supported by what he called "proofs" or "arguments" derived from history."[1]

As to the logical and rational basis of the structure of Judaism, Saadia followed al Mu^{c}tazilah's example and began with the concept of creation from which he deduced his conception of the unity of God and His attributes. According to Guttmann,

> . . . the God thus arrived at is a Creator-God, who by his free will originates the world. . . . From the idea of creation Saadia first deduces, with the customary arguments of Kalām, the unity of God. Creation itself posits the existence of only one God; to assume more would be sheer arbitrariness. . . . The idea of creation requires three fundamental attributes in God -- life, power and wisdom -- without which the act of creation would not be possible.[2]

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[1]pp. 315, 324.

[2]Guttmann, p. 77.

As it was for al Mu^ctazilah, these attributes are identical with God's essence.[1]

Saadia follows his discussions of creation and of God with a third treatise more closely related to man -- the treatise on commandments and prohibitions. The relation seen here between man and God is one of worship and service. Law, consisting of commandments and prohibitions, is designed to provide man with the means of worshipping God. As Saadia states in his preliminary observation to chapter one of the third treatise: "let me state, by way of introduction that our Lord, exalted and magnified be He, has informed us by the speech of His prophets that He has assigned to us a religion whereby we are to serve Him. It embraces laws prescribed for us by Him which we must observe and carry out with sincerity."[2]

Saadia's fourth treatise is a logical development from the third treatise. The commandments and prohibitions of the third treatise raise the question of man's obedience or disobedience and hence of reward and punishment. Saadia considers these themes the basic themes of all religion and religions:

> . . . when we examine all the books written by the prophets and the scholars of all peoples, however great their number might be, we discover that they all embrace no more than three basic themes (*'usūl*). The first in rank is that of commandments and prohibitions (*'amr wa nahy*). These constitute one classification. The second theme is reward and punishment (*thawāb wa ᶜiqāb*), which represents the consequences [of the observance or nonobservance of the commandments and prohibitions]. The third [theme consists of] an account of the men that lived virtuously in the various countries of the world and were,

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[1]Guttmann, p. 78.

[2]p. 138.

> therefore, successful, as well as of those who dealt corruptly in them and perished as a result. The interests of human well-being can be served completely only by a combination of these three themes.[1]

The third theme adds a historical dimension to the first and the second by observing the occurrence of the pattern of reward and punishment in history.

Man's freedom to obey or disobey God will give existence to virtue and vice, the good and the evil. This is the subject of Saadia's fifth treatise. "God's servants," he says, "may be classified with respect to their merits and demerits into ten categories; namely pious and impious, obedient and disobedient, perfect and imperfect, sinful and corrupt, renegade and penitent. There are also those whose merits and demerits are evenly balanced. They constitute a class apart and we shall discourse about them separately."[2]

Doing good or evil will logically lead to a process of judgment as seen in rewards and punishments. Saadia establishes the rationale of this process as follows:

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[1]p. 155. Al 'Amānāt, p. 126.

[2]p. 209. In Saadia's general description of these categories, the pious is he "in whose conduct the good deeds predominate" and the impious is he "in whose conduct evil deeds are predominant." The "obedient" and "disobedient" are identified in terms of their response to particular precepts through transgression, defiance, or their opposite. The "perfect" man is the one who succeeds "in fulfilling all commandments, positive as well as negative." The "imperfect" is the "negligent in regard to the performance of the practical precepts." The sinner is he who "transgresses negative precepts." The corrupt commits "serious transgressions" punishable by "extirpation" or "death." The "renegade" is he who "abandons the basic principle of the faith," that is, the belief in the one God. The "penitent" is he who "carries out the terms of repentance." pp. 209-220.

> . . . logic demands that whoever does something good be compensated either by means of a favor shown to him if he is in need of it, or by means of thanks, if he does not require any reward. Since, therefore, this is one of the greatest demands of reason, it would not have been seemly for the Creator, exalted and magnified be He, to neglect it in His own case. It was, on the contrary, necessary for Him to command his creatures to serve Him and thank Him for having created them.[1]

For Saadia, judgment will have to take place in a hereafter. This is for him also a demand of reason: "reason demands retribution in another world."[2] On this basis, Saadia in his sixth treatise deals with the soul and the state of death and the hereafter. He proceeds rationally to establish in his seventh treatise the belief in the resurrection of the dead against which he can find no "rational objection." In this regard, he states: "there is no rational objection to the doctrine [of resurrection] because the restoration of something that has once existed and disintegrated is more plausible logically than *creatio ex nihilo* (<u>'ikhtirā^{c}i shay'in min lā shay'</u>)."[3] Resurrection presupposes the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of redemption. He believes redemption is a logical necessity because God is just and there must therefore be "a cessation of the punishment of those punishable and compensation for those subject to trial."[4] At the time of redemption, Saadia maintains that "there will be vouchsafed to us a full itemization of the reward for every act of divine service

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[1] p. 139.

[2] p. 333.

[3] p. 267. <u>Al 'Amānāt</u>, p. 213.

[4] p. 291.

and a specification of the various types of punishment corresponding to each individual."[1] A doctrine of reward and punishment in the world to come, which constitutes the ninth treatise of Saadia's book, is (he claims) "supported by the three sources of knowledge, namely: reason, Scripture, and tradition."[2]

This concludes Saadia's view of the structure of the content of Judaism and its logical coherence. However, the book does not end with the doctrine of reward and punishment as the concluding item in this structure. The last chapter, fīmā huwa al 'aṣlaḥ 'an yaṣnaᶜahu al 'insān fi dāri al dunyā, rendered by Rosenblatt as "Ideal Human Conduct," is thought by many scholars to be an addition to the book and not included within its general plan. According to Malter, "the last chapter of the 'Amānāt, 'About That which is the Best for Man to do in this World,' is not a continuation of the thoughts developed in the chapters preceding it; nor does it in any other way fit into the general plan of the work before us."[3] In its content, this chapter, Malter indicates, is related to chapters 4 and 5.[4] According to him the only possible logical explanation for appending this chapter at the end of the nine treatises was that Saadia wanted to give the reader

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[1]p. 355.

[2]p. 336.

[3]Malter, p. 247. Malter points out that "it has been suggested that the work was written originally in separate essays under special titles, with a view of later combining and arranging them so as to form a systematic whole" (pp. 247-248).

[4]Ibid., p. 248. The table of contents given by Saadia at the end of his introduction to the book shows that chapters 7 and 9 are part of his original plan.

"some practical advice as to the course he should choose in order to be able to live in conformity with the religious doctrines laid down in the work."[1]

In our previous discussions, we repeatedly referred to Saadia's concern with the course of the individual's daily life. This concern agrees with Saadia's general understanding of the practical objectives of knowledge and the call that the individual should conduct his life according to the conclusions and results of knowledge. Saadia's attempt to base the ethics of Judaism on a rational scientific foundation and his concern for the practical implementation of his theoretical work justify the inclusion of this chapter as the final part of a book which was intended as a guide for confused individuals. To this effect, Saadia states in the introduction: "But inasmuch as my Lord had granted me some knowledge by which I might come to their assistance and had endowed me with some ability that I could put at their disposal for their benefit, I thought that it was my duty to help them therewith and my obligation to direct them to the truth."[2] Because the nine treatises in general do not prescribe a certain conduct which the individual Jew should follow in his daily life, it is logical to see that the last chapter as part of the original plan of the book. Its objective was to establish the standard ethical conduct and its social implications for the Jewish community. Without the inclusion of this last chapter the purpose of Al 'Amānāt would not have been fulfilled.

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[1]Malter, p. 248.

[2]p. 7.

5. The Interpretation of Judaism: The Multidimensional Approach

We emphasized earlier that it is through authentic tradition that a knowledge of the content of the Jewish religion becomes available. Saadia took tradition as the foundation for the study of Judaism, an approach which allowed him to include within the boundaries of his study a variety of elements, requiring for their analysis the cooperation of more than one discipline. Besides religio-philosophical interpretation, he used historical, psychological and sociological analysis to illuminate many unexplained dimensions of Judaism. These were often coupled with political and ethical insights into the content of Judaism. This multidimensional approach to Judaism permitted Saadia to consider the different factors which constituted the content of a varied tradition.

a. The Philosophical Explanation of Judaism

For Saadia, philosophy plays a two-fold function. The first concerns the rationalization of religious belief for the sake of understanding. As we explained earlier, this need not imply a conflict between reason and revelation. Philosophical analysis, in this first sense, is used in most of Saadia's work and constitutes one of the important features of his thought. Philosophical and logical explanations are widely used to provide for the establishment of the science of Judaism.

Besides this general usage of philosophical explanation, Saadia uses philosophical analysis more particularly in the explanation of

those religious issues which are by their very nature philosophical in content. However, he does not regard issues common both to religion and philosophy as originating in philosophy. He considers such issues as religious beliefs which constitute an integral part of the Jewish religious experience. Philosophy must analyze these matters of religious knowledge, but by no means may they be said to originate in philosophy; philosophy works on previously established religious data. Thus religion is saved from being reduced to philosophy. All philosophical theories which do not agree with the essential character of Judaism are rejected by Saadia.

Saadia's philosophical speculation is in the final analysis methodological: it serves to analyze religion, but is no substitute for religion. One of the methodological features of philosophical speculation, as mentioned earlier, is the _epôché_. The main function of the _epôché_ is suspension of all beliefs for the sake of establishing the truth about them. For Saadia the _epôché_ stands by itself as a guardian against the acceptance of blind belief if one follows religious precepts without questioning their validity and their conformity with the rules of reason. The _epôché_ is therefore a philosophical principle which if coupled with positive philosophical doubt will prevent the imposition of _a priori_ concepts which do not yield to the analytical power of the cognitive faculty of the soul. It also assists in purifying the content of religion from notions based on uncritical natural thinking. The _epôché_ is also used in the modern study of religion as a methodological principle derived from phenomenology. Bleeker explains this philosophical aid to the history of religions: "philosophical

phenomenology can render us a service, because it has invented a procedure of research which can be adapted to sciences of another type, as for example, the history of religions. This method is twofold: it can be described as the '*epôché*' and the 'eidetic vision.'"[1] The *epôché* is usually defined as "suspension of judgment." In using it, Bleeker maintains, "one puts oneself into the position of a listener, who does not judge according to preconceived notions."[2] Thus, in using the *epôché* in the history of religions, all presuppositions, including the philosophical, are suspended for the sake of a free description of religious phenomena. The *epôché* usefully limits the effect of *a priori* philosophical assumptions on the description of religious phenomena.

In application, Saadia does not limit the use of the *epôché* to the philosophical content of Judaism but extends its application to revelation and prophecy. He accepts revelation on the basis of authentic tradition, but he continues his inquiry until he can prove it by other means. In his discussion of the concept of God, Saadia adopts the following procedure:

> . . . we have been informed by our Lord, magnified and exalted be He, through the pronouncements of His prophets that He is one, living, omnipotent, and omniscient, that there is nothing that resembles Him, and that He does not resemble any of His works. This thesis [the prophets] supported by means of miracles and marvels, so that we accepted it immediately while waiting for its verification for us by speculation.[3]

This statement implies the suspension of the acceptance of what

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[1]Bleeker, "The Relation of the History of Religions to Kindred Religious Sciences," *Numen*, Vol. I, Fasc. II (1954), p. 148.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 148.

[3]p. 94.

revelation -- along with its miracles -- says about God. Philosophical speculation is used only for the verification of religious matters. Verification, however, must be distinguished from evaluation. Evaluation to Saadia is not a function for philosophy regarding religious matters. It is rather authentic tradition which evaluates religious concepts and determines their inclusion within the tradition. Thus, the system of evaluation is the religious factor itself represented by authentic tradition and not a philosophical principle imposed on religion.

Furthermore, Saadia acknowledges that not all of religion may be explained philosophically. This becomes clear in his discussion of the ritual forms of Judaism and of the content of the Commandments. Despite his rational and empirical orientation, he acknowledges the existence of a non-rational element in religion which philosophy cannot explain. This non-rational element is directly connected with the understanding of religious actions as an expression of man's submission towards God. Submission and obedience as the essence of religious belief acquire more significance when they are applied to the non-rational content of belief.

Saadia divides the commandments into two general groups, those accessible to reason and those which cannot be explained by reason. The first group includes "classes of acts" the approval of which "is implanted in our minds just as is the disapproval of each of the classes of acts that we are forbidden to commit."[1] These are "the rational

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[1]p. 140.

precepts of the Torah."[1] The second group of laws "consists of things neither the approval nor the disapproval of which is decreed by reason, on account of their own character, but in regard to which our Lord has imposed upon us a profusion of commandments and prohibitions in order thereby to increase our reward and happiness."[2] The fulfillment of this second category of laws belongs to the realm of obedience. As Saadia states, "What is commanded of this group of acts is, consequently, [to be considered as] good, and what is prohibited as reprehensible; because the fulfillment of the former and the avoidance of the latter implies submissiveness to God."[3] Obedience to the second group of laws is purely an act of worship. It is the acceptance of these acts "on account of their own character"[4] which designates

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[1]p. 141.

[2]p. 140.

[3]pp. 140-141. Guttmann defines Saadia's two groups of laws as "rational commandments" and "commandments of obedience." See Philosophies of Judaism, p. 79. The term "rational commandments" has been rejected by Marvin Fox who in a recent study tried to explain Saadia's meaning of the term "rational." In his analysis, Fox points out that "commentators on Saadia have gone to extremes." Some have equated "the rational in Saadia's usage with logical necessity," and he cites Guttmann as an example. Others have interpreted rationality "in purely utilitarian terms" meaning that "the rational commandments are reasonable in the sense that they can be seen to serve useful purposes." Fox rejects both interpretations claiming that "neither addresses itself sufficiently to the bewildering complex of problems that careful study of the texts forces us to confront." According to him, there is no philosophically acceptable sense in which Saadia can be said to have shown that there are rational commandments." This designation, Fox claims, "derives from a reading that pays attention to the terms Saadia used rather than to the argument on which his statements are based. Calling a statement rationally necessary does not suffice to make it so." See Marvin Fox, "On the Rational Commandments in Saadia's Philosophy: A Reexamination," in Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice, ed. Marvin Fox (Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 174-175, 186.

[4]p. 140.

exemplary religious commitment. These acts are explained by Norbert Samuelson as "acts whose value lies in the divine command. They are good because God commands them, not that they are commanded because they are good."[1]

At the same time, this second group of commandments is related to the first through the same principle of obedience. In this regard, Saadia maintains: "From this standpoint (submissiveness to God) they might be attached secondarily to the first [general] division [of the laws of the Torah]."[2] The link between the two groups is of paramount importance because in it the totality of the Jewish experience of religion is expressed. Thus, Saadia states that God "has assigned to us a religion whereby we are to serve Him. It embraces laws prescribed for us by Him which we must observe and carry out with sincerity."[3] Here there is no distinction between rational laws and laws of obedience. Both complement each other in constituting the totality of the commandments and prohibitions. Another form of unity between the two groups of laws is suggested by Samuelson as follows: "as the rational laws are moral demands which have religious force, so the non-rational laws are religious acts which have moral force. The first category consists of man's obligations to his fellow man which entail obligations to God. The second category consists of man's special obligations to God which entail special obligations to

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[1]Norbert Samuelson, "Saadia and the Logic of Religious Authority," Judaism, Vol. 20 (1971), No. 4, p. 462.

[2]p. 141.

[3]p. 138.

man."[1]

Saadia's explanation of the non-rational laws in terms of obedience does not exclude their justification in terms of reason. In fact, he tends to leave the door of reason open for giving an explanation for this group of laws: "Nevertheless one cannot help noting, upon deeper reflection, that they have some partial uses as well as a certain slight justification from the point of view of reason, just as those belonging to the first [general] division have important uses and great justification from the point of view of reason."[2] However, since Saadia sees cognition as a gradual process, the existence of the non-rational in religious law or in religion at large may be expected. According to Saadia, man is a finite creature and so is his knowledge. And because the knowledge of religion is infinite, man's faculty of cognition falls short of comprehending it. This failure, however, is not static or permanent. Man's progress in knowledge is gradual and it remains possible that he will gradually come to understand the elements in religion which escape his reason. The existence of the non-rational corresponds to the imperfect and finite knowledge of man: "since man's body is limited, finite, whatever powers reside in it -- and the faculty of knowledge is one of them -- must necessarily be finite."[3]

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[1]Samuelson, p. 463.

[2]p. 141. Elsewhere Saadia states that the second division of laws "consists of acts which from the standpoint of reason are optional. Yet the Law has made some of them obligatory and others forbidden, and left the rest optional as they had been." p. 143.

[3]p. 89.

To accept those precepts of religion "on account of their own character" offers a great challenge, yet the failure of reason to explain their existence in the body of religious knowledge does not justify their rejection. To carry them out is to cherish the religious per se and to accept willingly the a priori religious character of the experience. And because these laws consist mostly of the ritual elements of religion,[1] to deny them is to destroy the most important characteristic of religion. Saadia's defense of this religious dimension brings harmony and unity to religious life. To achieve such unity, he has to limit philosophy to the task of explaining religious beliefs on their own terms. Richard P. McKeon has rightly pointed out that "Saadia's speculations were directed to the construction of a religious philosophy, and may therefore be viewed in a narrow sense as an employment of philosophy in the defense and reinforcement of the Jewish religion, yet, in a more fundamental sense, he treats the basic beliefs of mankind in terms of their basic elements."[2]

b. The Ethical Dimension of Religion and the Rational Imperative

In the realm of ethics, Saadia insists upon the rationality of every moral claim. His distinction between "rational commandments" and

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[1]According to Saadia, these laws "include such matters as the consecration of certain days from among others, like the Sabbath and the festivals, and the consecration of certain human beings from among others, such as the prophet and the priest, and refraining from eating certain foods, and the avoidance of cohabitation with certain persons, and going into isolation immediately upon the occurrence of certain accidents because of defilement." p. 143.

[2]Richard P. McKeon, p. 104.

"commandments of obedience" is basically founded on that firm insistence upon ethical rationality. As Guttmann explains: "The demands of ethics have their source not only in revelation, but also in the dictates of reason. It is especially in the realm of ethics that Saadia maintains the superiority of reason to revelation; he demands that every prophetic doctrine be legitimized by its agreement with the rational claims of morality, even before their divine origin is further examined by reference to miracles."[1] This demand for the rationality of ethical norms is adopted by Saadia for empirical reasons which correspond to the role these ethical norms play in the life of the individual and his community.[2] Doing good and shunning evil is, Saadia believes, a matter of knowledge. The good originates from true knowledge and the source of evil is ignorance. However, Saadia traces good and evil psychologically to man's will, and he accepts that man's passions have an important impact not only on the acquisition of knowledge but on the manner in which this knowledge is used.

Thus we may say that Saadia's thought develops from a theory of knowledge to end as a metaphysics of ethics in which absolute knowledge is identified with absolute conduct. This state is exemplified by men who conduct themselves in accordance with the teachings of science, natural, political and religious. Thus, Saadia equates life

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[1]Guttmann, p. 79.

[2]Saadia even explains the need for messengers and prophets in order to put the rational precepts to work. Thus, he maintains that the dispatch of messengers is "not merely in order that they might be informed by them about the revealed laws, but also on account of the rational precepts. For these latter, too, are carried out practically only when there are messengers to instruct men concerning them." p. 145.

with wisdom as follows: "what man acquires through wisdom and through compliance with the law is called 'life.'. . . On the other hand, what the fool achieves as a result of his folly is called 'death.'"[1] And because wisdom is reason, "the affairs of the world" must be subjected to "analysis" in order to reach "much better results" which "are achieved with the help of the concentration of the mind."[2] In the final analysis, all aspects of good life are achievements of correct knowledge. The ultimate purpose of knowledge, then, is good conduct in life. Saadia's theory of knowledge is translated into practical tersm to provide a rationale for moral action. His main objective, we can now see, is to provide an ethical system established on scientific knowledge. His interpretation of the Jewish religion revolves around this central objective. As Guttmann says, "The main purpose of revelation is thus not theoretical but practical, and even the theoretical truths taught by religion merely serve as presuppositions to the ethical content of revelation."[3]

c. The Psychological Basis of Ethical Conduct and its Social Implications

The success of Saadia's program lay mainly in his ability to translate abstract thought into concrete terms applicable to a real social group, the Jewish community of his day. His theory of knowledge could be justified only if its results were exemplified in an

[1] p. 330.

[2] pp. 407-408.

[3] Guttmann, p. 80.

actual social system. Saadia's work, at its best, is characterized by its social orientation, its applicability to a real world. This may explain why Saadia is now acknowledged as the most active scientist in the Jewish community of his day and why his life work covered almost all aspects of that living community. His thought, in theory and in practice, met the religious and social needs of his community. His objective was primarily to improve the religious and social status of the Medieval Jew whose beliefs and opinions he found to be unsatisfactory and mostly based on erroneous conceptions.

This societal concern functioned as the major factor behind Saadia's reinterpretation and restructuralization of Judaism. He understands the rational and the scientific qualities of religion in terms of the function they fulfill for society and its members. Religious precepts become meaningful through their function in the individual's life and in the life of the community. Their meaning is measured according to the degree in which they improve society. This social concern makes Saadia insist on the rational characteristic of the ethical dimension of religion. At times, this social concern acquires a utilitarian quality.[1] According to Alexander Altmann, Saadia's work

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[1]Earlier, we quoted Fox's observation that some writers on Saadia have explained rationality in terms of utilitarianism. The rational commandments "are reasonable in the sense that they can be seen to serve useful purposes." See Fox, p. 175. Guttmann, who understands "rational" to imply logical necessity, is particularly critical of Saadia's utilitarianism: "In its concrete application to details, Saadia's ethic nationalism remains somewhat superficial. Reason teaches us that creatures are obliged to give thanks to God for his mercies, and forbids us to blaspheme his name or to injure one another. From this latter rule Saadia derives most important ethical commandments in a somewhat primitive utilitarian manner." See Guttmann, p. 80.

is basically devoted to the fulfillment of the needs of his environment. Altmann maintains that Al 'Amānāt "gives a full and comprehensive answer to all the problems which agitated the mind of his contemporaries."[1] It is a "collection of living answers to living questions."[2] Guttmann claims that Saadia "develops . . . a eudaemonistic ideal: the correct mode of life is that which leads to the satisfaction of man's needs and to the development of all his powers."[3]

In his work, Saadia gave considerable attention to the analysis of the personality of the individual and its impact upon his religious and social behavior. He felt that any reform of society must begin with the individual. In order to reconcile individual and social needs, one must understand the psychology of the individual and direct it towards the benefit of society without losing the integrity of the human character.

Saadia's diagnosis of the religious condition of his time depends mainly on his personal observations of the behavior of individual Jews and their attitudes towards religious matters. His observations focus on the fact that the majority of them were motivated in their religious behavior by their own natures; they had subjected religious understanding to their individual ways of thinking instead of founding

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[1]Alexander Altmann, ed., "Saadia Gaon: Book of Doctrines and Beliefs," in Three Jewish Philosophers (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 16.

[2]Ibid., p. 17.

[3]Guttmann, p. 80, extends his criticism of Saadia by stating that "The injunction to live a happy life, and the ethics of commandment and duty, stand side by side without any attempt at reconciliation."

it on reason. The phenomena of belief and disbelief are, thus, explained in terms of individual motives. Analyzing the situation, Saadia affirms that most individuals behave according to their natural inclinations. The nature of man is complex and his actions reflect that complexity. Saadia claims complexity for all created things, including man, when he says,

> . . . inasmuch as the Creator of the Universe, exalted and magnified by He, is essentially one, it follows by logical necessity that His creatures be composed of many elements . . . the thing that generally gives the appearance of constituting a unity, whatever sort of unity it be, is singular only in number. Upon careful consideration, however, it is found to be of a multiple nature.[1]

In relation to man, Saadia states: "Having made this preliminary observation, I say now that the same thing applies to the tendencies exhibited by man. He evinces a liking for many things and a dislike for others."[2]

Man's behavior is the direct result of his complex nature. Saadia maintains, "But just as in each instance the final product is the result of a combination of ingredients in larger or small proportions, so too, is man's behavior the resultant of a combination of his likes and dislikes in varying proportions."[3] Accordingly, man "acts as though he were a judge to whom the disposal of the different tendencies is submitted for decision."[4] Saadia concludes that, left to their own

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[1]p. 357.

[2]p. 358.

[3]p. 358.

[4]p. 358.

judgments and tendencies, men tend toward extremes in their behavior. He devotes most of his last chapter to the analysis of thirteen different activities of men and in every case he shows how man naturally tends to take the extreme path by adopting what he calls "a one-sided choice"[1] which is "quite serious" in its impact on his life and the life of his community. This phenomenon is empirically proved by Saadia as follows:

> What impelled me to put this theme at the beginning of the present treatise is the fact that I have seen people who think -- and with them it is a firm conviction -- that it is obligatory for human beings to order their entire existence upon the exploitation of one trait, lavishing their love on one thing above all others and their hatred on a certain thing above the rest. Now I investigated this view and found it to be extremely erroneous for sundry reasons.[2]

This kind of behavior leaves a devastating impact on man's soul, the source of all his powers, including knowledge. The condition of the soul varies in accordance with the kind of actions man decides to undertake: "these activities of men leave their traces upon the latter's souls, rendering them pure or sullied."[3] The soul is affected by the sort of actions men decide to perform, their choice is governed by their psychological make-up, so a man's psychology affects the state of his soul. Altmann regards this concept of the impact of actions on the soul as "a crude anticipation of the modern Psychology of the

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[1]p. 359. These activities or pursuits include: "abstinence, eating and drinking, sexual intercourse, eroticism, the accumulation of money, [the begetting of] children, the [material] development of the land, longevity, dominion, the nursing of revenge, [the acquisition of] wisdom, worship and rest." p. 364.

[2]p. 359.

[3]p. 204.

Unconscious." Saadia's distinctive contribution according to Altmann is his "stress on the unconscious character of these impressions" left on man's soul.[1]

Saadia's remedy for this state of affairs stems from a response to the actual structure of man's character. Since he is complex, man must try to harmonize his different likes and dislikes. This harmony can be achieved through the careful regulation of man's conduct and behavior. According to Saadia, this

> . . . consists . . . in his exercising control over his impulses and having complete mastery over his likes and dislikes, for each has its distinctive role in which it must be made to function. Once, then, he recognizes the role belonging to a given impulse, he must give it full opportunity to discharge its function in the required measure. On the other hand, if he sees an instance in which the said impulse should be checked, he must restrain it until the ground for such restraint no longer exists for him. All this is to be done with due deliberation and with the power to release or hold.[2]

This position is compared by Saadia to that of one "who would weigh these impulses with a balance and give to each its due measure."[3] If "a person behaves in this manner, his affairs will be properly adjusted and well grounded."[4]

Saadia accepts complexity as proper for man and his remedy for man's problems recommends preservation of that complexity. In order to avoid extremity in action, Saadia suggests that a balance should be kept between the various impulses of man, a harmony between his likes

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[1]Altmann, p. 129.

[2]p. 360.

[3]p. 358.

[4]p. 358.

and dislikes. Each impulse must be used for its proper role but it must at the same time be controlled. Malter claims that this notion implies the Aristotelian doctrine of the "Golden Mean." Saadia, according to him, is the first medieval Jewish thinker who utilized this doctrine for Jewish ethics, followed by Maimonides and others. According to Malter's explanation of Saadia,

> . . . one must beware of exaggerations and excesses, carrying out all functions of life at the proper time and in the proper place, refraining therefrom when reason or religion so demands . . . even in the physical world it is only through a proper distribution and coordination of forces that we arrive at the highest possible good, how much more it is desirable that we should follow the same method in our moral and religious conduct, for it is only through achievement of inner harmony and equilibrium that we can attain a perfectly sound and godly life.[1]

The well-adjusted person can exercise such control over his impulses, which can be achieved only through man's dominion over the various faculties of his soul. Among these faculties, the cognitive faculty should "exercise judgment" over the other faculties, namely, the "appetitive" and the "impulsive." This is how Saadia distinguishes psychologically the disciplined person from the non-disciplined: "Any person . . . who follows this course of giving his cognitive faculty dominion over his appetites and impulses, is disciplined. . . . Any man, on the other hand, who permits his appetites and impulses to dominate his faculty of cognition, is undisciplined."[2] Saadia speaks of "the need for the proper balancing of these three strivings."[3] The complete

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[1]Malter, pp. 257, 259.

[2]p. 361.

[3]p. 363.

and perfect person is the one who can bring about the "balancing of the tendencies of his character and the objects of his strivings."[1] Saadia concludes that:

> The net result of our investigation . . . is that a person should exert himself in his mundane affairs to the extent required for his well-being. He should eat and drink what is permissible in accordance with his needs. Beyond that point his attention should be turned to the acquisition of wisdom, to the service of God, and to the establishment of a reputation for goodness and probity. To each of the aforementioned objects of striving . . . a person should devote himself at its appropriate time . . . each of the tendencies of man's character, as well as of his desires, should be given vent to at the appropriate time.[2]

Elsewhere, Saadia maintains that "one should take from each type of activity the suitable proportion as dictated by science and religious law."[3]

Thus, perfection of character and morals is seen by Saadia to be the result of man's "harmonious blending" and the proper systematization of his impulses. To regulate man's conduct in this proper manner, the cognitive power should be given mastery over the irrational faculties of the soul.[4] Thus, the categories "disciplined" and "undisciplined" whether interpreted psychologically or sociologically are

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[1]p. 404. As Husik explains: "Wisdom is . . . needed in regulating one's conduct . . . it is by a proper systematization of his likes and dislikes that [man] can reach perfection of character and morals." According to Husik, Saadia "attempts to give a psychological basis for human conduct." Husik, pp. 46-47.

[2]pp. 404-406.

[3]p. 399.

[4]Husik maintains in this regard that Saadia follows the Platonic example by trying "to base an ethic on the proper relation between the powers of the soul." See Husik, p. 47.

results of knowledge or its absence. The necessity for inner harmony in the individual's character is a social necessity too insofar as the nature of society depends on the individual's character. The complex nature of society is a reflection of man's complexity. Saadia's discussion of what is best for man, based on a psychological analysis of man's character, is an attempt to harmonize society through the harmony brought about between individuals by controlling extreme behavior.

Saadia criticizes men whose behavior is extreme because he sees such behavior as detrimental to society. Hermits, he says, "go to impossible extremes in abandoning the amenities of civilized existence. For they leave out of consideration the essentials of sustenance, clothing, and shelter. Nay, they fail to think of their very lives for by renouncing marriage they cause the process of procreation to be interrupted."[1] Husband and wife should be "affectionate to each other for the sake of the maintenance of the world."[2] Eating and drinking are important factors for "social intercourse and friendly commerce among people and their friends."[3] Begetting children should be also considered in terms of individual and social needs.[4] Man should engage himself in the "habitation of the world" and its improvement and should

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[1]p. 366.

[2]p. 377.

[3]p. 368.

[4]On this, Saadia asks, "of what benefit are children to a person if he is unable to provide for their sustenance, covering or shelter? And what is the good of raising them if it will not be productive of wisdom and knowledge on their part?" p. 381.

"serve his needs as far as they go."[1] Leadership is a social necessity but it must be controlled by society lest it turn into a dictatorship and love of dominion which will result in "a failure of worldly affairs."[2] Taking revenge is permitted only for the sake of justice and the preservation of society.[3] Even the "quest for scientific knowledge" may not be pursued to the exclusion of other activities.[4] The human race would cease to exist if men, engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, neglected marriage; knowledge itself would come to an end.[5] Finally, "exclusive preoccupation with physical science would constitute an abandonment of the cultivation of the science of religion and religious law." Both sciences must be undertaken together because, as Saadia states, they make "an excellent combination."[6]

Saadia explains that worship is only one of man's activities, which must not exclude other activities. He says, if

> . . . a person were not to concern himself about his food, his body could not exist. Again, if he were not to concern himself with the begetting of offspring, divine worship would

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[1]p. 385.

[2]p. 388.

[3]In this regard, Saadia states: "The only reason . . . that the desire to take revenge has been implanted in the soul of man is in order that God's justice might be carried out against the evildoers in the lands and that the welfare of mankind might be served." pp. 392-393.

[4]According to Saadia, if "while engaged in acquiring knowledge, a person failed to concern himself about his sustenance, shelter, and clothing, his knowledge would be nullified, since his existence depends on these things." p. 393.

[5]p. 394.

[6]p. 394.

> cease altogether, for if all members of a particular generation were to agree upon such a course and then die, divine worship would die together with them.[1]

Worship must be regulated and men may not disregard other activities which in one way or another are essential for the maintenance of worship. Each activity must be practiced in its proper time and place. Worship fulfills the same social function fulfilled by other activities. It is designed for the welfare and survival of society.[2] Even rest has a social function; it is "appropriate for man after great exertion and the disposal of his needs and the preparation of the means of his livelihood."[3]

The balancing of man's activities and the "harmonious blending" of all his inclinations maintain an ordered social system. Religion requires moderation, for the preservation of life. Saadia sees Judaism as a socially functioning religion. All religious laws are seen as responding to a social need. At the same time religious activities and practices are supported by other social activities. Thus, religion and society interact together to ensure the harmony of man's character and his social welfare.

The focus of man's activity is social order and his moral conduct is social insofar as it affects the interests of others. The

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[1]p. 396.

[2]On the necessity of worship and its social significance, Saadia states: "worship has been established by God as a means for the attainment of the reward of the hereafter, so, too, is it impossible to dispense with the effort to earn a livelihood and marriage and other occupations that have been designed by God as means conducive to the welfare of mankind." p. 397.

[3]pp. 397-398.

interdependence of the individual and the community makes personal behavior the cornerstone of social order. Saadia's approach to ethics stresses above all the state of society and its preservation. Ethical norms are societal regulations with consequences pertaining to social organization. Saadia explored the factual religious and social conditions of the Jewish community, evaluated personal behavior and suggested a norm of behavior for which he tried to find support in the Tradition. In fact, it is from the Tradition that he derived norms by which societal moral standards were to be evaluated. By quoting Biblical verses he tried to show that the middle way of balanced behavior has its roots in the Bible.

To Saadia the source of morality is religion. He provides ethical action with an ultimate objective. Saadia justifies the ethical norm by linking it to a transcendental order or divine will and by aiming it at a hereafter.[1] Religion, thus, is the source and end of ethical action. The disciplined and balanced actions of man are his means of attaining the rewards of the hereafter. Thus, one can safely conclude that Saadia equates the moral with the religious without reducing religion to morality.

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[1]pp. 397, 399.

CONCLUSION

Since religion is an aspect of knowledge, the establishment of its validity on a rational basis requires the establishment of the validity of knowledge per se. Knowledge is obtained through a cognitive process which involves interaction between a knowing subject and an object of knowledge. An accurate process of validation must consider both the subject and the object.

The subject should attempt to reach a state of clarity in which the subject is capable of rationally perceiving the object. This implies rejection of all preconceptions and innate opinions. It implies rejection of any sort of thinking which is not self-critical, which does not question why a certain phenomenon is thought of as an objective fact. We must move beyond natural biased and uncritical thinking to establish knowledge on a rational foundation based on clarity of mind. "Inner being" is a quality which the subject acquires after subjecting his self to a process of purification of his mental attitudes.

The first step towards this state of clarity is to suspend all knowledge obtained through habitual thinking by a series of positive doubts which are part and parcel of the process of cognition. Because this process is sequential, a series of doubts must accompany the various stages of cognition. During these stages, the object is gradually subjected to a process of refinement and purification until it reaches its most abstract form which is its pure essence. Each stage

in the gradual process of cognition accompanied by methodical, evaluational doubt is complete in itself. The need to correct will involve only the last completed phase. There is no return to the concrete data if this process is applied in an exact, systematic manner. To return to the concrete is to nullify the knowledge then completed and render the process of cognition null and void. This is a violation of the principles of scientific research. In this process, doubt is a 'function of thinking,' a rethinking of thinking in which the subject self-evaluates the process of thinking. However, doubt or incomplete knowledge must be distinguished from error, the result of false knowledge. An error in the process of cognition results from an error in perception or from a natural inclination created by the irrational power of the soul. With doubt, we have a dynamic building up of knowledge in which we move from imperfect knowledge about a certain object to a complete one. The end of doubt is itself the end of the process of cognition.

Such doubt does not mean total negation of the object. The reality of objective truth and the possibility of cognition admit doubt as a necessary part of cognition, not its denial. An objective truth is temporarily bracketed until it is proven subjectively. This establishes the role of the consciousness of one's self (wijdān [al nafs]) as a primary factor in the attempt to know. It also establishes the self as a knowing self in possession of the power of thinking as implanted in human consciousness (bawāṭin al nās). From the self, the necessary subjective start, one proceeds to affirm the reality of the world and objective truth, whose acceptance the knower does not have to

suspend or bracket any longer. Three steps can be distinguished in this process. In consciousness of our own being, the first step is to accept the factuality of objective truth. The second stage is to suspend this knowledge of objective truth (set it aside) in order to prove its reality through reasoning, which is, in turn, based on our discovery of our consciousness as a thinking consciousness. In the third stage objective reality is validated subjectively and thus acquires the status of a belief (<u>i^{c}tiqād</u>). Thus, whatever is known on the basis of the natural attitude is suspended for the purpose of reflection and thinking. After thought and reflection are systematically analyzed, belief in the reality of what was thought ends the process.

To reach "inner being" or "pure soul," the self must be subjected to a process of refinement which reduces the soul's faculties and powers to one power, the power of cognition. It is a suspension of our experiences of the world as notions created by the rational and irrational powers of the soul. To know is to suspend the work of these powers in order to single out the rational soul as the basis of cognition. The discovery of the cognitive soul is a discovery of the subject as a thinking self. This cognitive power of the soul functions as a critical purifier of what is furnished by reason.

The process of "dropping from the mind" is a phenomenological reduction of the subject's conception of a certain object. As such, both the subject and the object are involved. The object gradually undergoes a systematic, scientific process whose objective is to reach the most abstract form of the object. This, however, cannot be reached without reducing the power of the soul to its rational cognitive faculty.

Therefore, we have two reductions. The first is mental and subjective; the subject of knowledge reduces all its powers to the power of cognition. The second is a systematic reduction of the object to its pure essence.

This system of thought transcends its theoretical formulation to have practical application to the knowledge of religion. We started theoretically by accepting objective truth and the reality of the world on the basis of the discovery of the consciousness of the self (ego) (wijdān al nafs) as a deterrent against universal negation. To apply this notion to religion as an aspect of knowledge, we must begin by accepting the objective truth supplied by the sources of religious knowledge, including revelation and prophecy. To deny these is again to deny the existence of the self. However, these a priori concepts will have to be suspended as objective truths until they are proven by means other than themselves. In analyzing objects of a religious nature, we must know first what is said about them in the religious sources including Scriptures. Then, this knowledge must be set aside in order to understand religious objects rationally. This, in turn, will make us believe in those concepts on the basis of their rational validation. Know, think and believe are three essential stages of cognition in religion. The first is totally objective, the second is subjective, and the third is a return to the objective which is now based on the subjective.

Thus the knowledge of religion, like other forms of knowledge, acquires a rational basis which renders it empirical, apt for description and finally free of preconceptions. Its basis is observation, the

foundation of all knowledge, which is consonant with the empirical character of religious knowledge and meets the practical needs of religious men. Direct observation is a source of religious knowledge that is within the power of all men. Knowledge or Ḥokhmah includes all the sciences and, from its own qualities, Ḥokhmah is also a method of the sciences. It provides the scientific basis for all research; yet it is also the content of the sciences. Thus in Ḥokhmah there is a unity of method and content. As such it is to be distinguished from phenomenology as denoting a method above the sciences. The belief which Ḥokhmah endorses is an agreement between the reality of things and the manner of their appearance. Heresy is a misrepresentation of reality produced by an imperfect process of knowing. Both belief and heresy are mental states regarding something known. The first represents a complete rational process of cognition; the second reflects an inadequacy in cognition which fails to render to our consciousness reality as it is. Truth is an assertion about a thing as it is in its actual character.

Because the knowledge of religion differs from other aspects of knowledge, it requires a special system of hermeneutics. Religious phenomena must be interpreted first as religious facts; although they are not isolated but reflect social, cultural, and historical elements which are significant for understanding them. Adherence to one aspect of religion will end in reducing all of religion to that special aspect. Religious phenomena demand a multifarious process of interpretation to explain their many aspects and manifestations. The most important step of the hermeneutical system is to relive the historical past and

to transmit modes of thought of earlier generations of religious men, especially how they expressed their religious experience. Tradition, history and experience, all assist in explaining the meaning of religious expression. Hermeneutics must provide a rational explanation of religious expressions without limiting the meaning of these expressions.

While tradition functions as a source of religious knowledge, it also verifies the religious data acquired through other sources. Further, it transforms religious data from abstract notions into experienced phenomena rooted in historical consciousness. Tradition shows religion as a living reality in the total life of the religious individual. Viewing religion within the larger concept of tradition enlarges the hermeneutical task to include the systematization of the data of religion which, as part of the tradition, reflect different orientations and interests and thus demand a multidimensional interpretation. Logically, religious phenomena are intrinsically related; therefore a rational structuralization is possible. The tradition helps to locate separate phenomena within the general body of religion to give it form and system. Non-rational elements in religion which tradition cannot explain are to be followed because adherence to them is an act of obedience, and obedience is the essence of religion. Secondly, man's progress in knowledge may yet provide an explanation for those non-rational elements. The inability of man to understand their meanings is only a reflection of his finite knowledge.

The final goal of knowledge is to base man's life on a scientific foundation. Sociologically, this implies that knowledge must be taken as a source of society's order. However, theoretical knowledge

is confined to its theoretical context unless it acquired a function to perform in man's life. The ethical content of religion must be rooted in knowledge which is rational. This is essential for society's survival. A theory of religious knowledge is only justified if its results are exemplified in an actual social system: metaphysical idealism cannot be a part of a system which is socially oriented. A phenomenological theory of knowledge will remain idealistic if it is not translated into conduct, for the true knowledge of the objective world will make its residence as an idea in the "mind of the ego," but it will enjoy no existence in reality if it does not translate itself into an outer activity. Both Descartes and Husserl showed a theoretical interest in the development of scientific ethics, that is, ethics which are based on rational knowledge; but this interest did not exceed its theoretical limitation. In contrast, the goal of Saadia's theory of cognition is absolute conduct. He translates doing good or bad into a matter of knowledge or ignorance. Husserl's thought is best described as a critique of the existence of the "world of experience" and the validity of "mundane experience" but not as a system for the conduct of such experience. Although Husserl's thought deals with the objective world of experience, it is isolated from it. "Pure consciousness" does not reside in the world of experience, neither during the process of becoming pure nor after it. The "transcendental ego" becomes one with knowledge in a way which implies an unidentified mysticism in the thought of Husserl. Certainly, the phenomenological way, with its suspensions and reductions, resembles the stages of the mystical way. Both are socially empty.

In Saadia's thought, to hold that knowledge begins and ends with a theory is to limit the function of knowledge to the mere process of philosophization, with no practical results for man's life. Saadia's theory and the process he developed towards acquiring true knowledge leave two impacts on the knower. It will first improve his "inner being." The improvement of "inner being" leads to an improvement of "outer conduct." While ethics and values are possible subjects for phenomenological research, the fear is that the ethical world created by phenomenology will be as idealistic as the rest of phenomenological philosophy. The realistic approach of Saadia sees ethics as based on facts of human nature and existence. There is a correspondence between the ethical principles and the actual conduct of man. If men "conduct themselves according to the teachings of the sciences," an ethical world is possible. The "disciplined person" is he who has control over his faculty of cognition. Values are the final goal of knowledge which, if false, leads to a false understanding of values. True knowledge is viewed by Saadia as the source of happiness for man in this world and in the hereafter. Regulation of man's life on the basis of scientific knowledge leads to the achievement of this goal.

The real test for any theory of knowledge lies in its ability to translate the abstract and theoretical into concrete terms when applied to a real social group. The goals and achievements of a correct critique of cognition cannot be viewed in a practical manner unless it changes the direction of society on the basis of the new obtained knowledge. Its power is linked to its ability to function in a real world and to be always in touch with individual and social realities. A

theory of cognition as a critique of knowledge must lead to a correct theory of religion with its value system. We believe that Saadia's philosophical phenomenology and his phenomenology of religion, both in theory and in practice, met the social and religious needs of his day.

PART III

AL SHAHRASTĀNĪ ON THE SYSTEMATIC SCIENCE OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS: A STUDY IN THE STRUCTURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF WORLD RELIGIONS AND SECTS

INTRODUCTION

Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al Karīm al Shahrastānī (479-548 A.H./1086-1153 A.D.) has been widely acknowledged as the most objective medieval writer on the subject of religions, sects, philosophies and philosophical schools. The Encyclopédie de l'Islām describes him as "le principal représentant de l'histoire des religions dans le moyen-âge oriental. . . . Comme analyste des systèmes, il est très fin et en général très objectif. Son livre n'a pas le caractère avant tout apologétique qu'a dû avoir, par exemple, l'ouvrage perdu d'al-Ashᶜari sur les sectes."[1] Al Shahrastānī's objectivity stems from the application of a rigorous scientific system. This is emphasized by al Shahrastānī in the following words: "We will describe the beliefs of mankind from Adam, peace be upon him, up to our own day, according to a plan whose categories will not permit the omission of a single doctrine. Under each category (bāb) and division (qism), we will report what is appropriate so that it will be clearly known why such a term (lafẓ) is ascribed to such a category. Under the description of each sect (firqah), we will report the doctrines and beliefs that are common to its types ('aṣnāf) and under each type (ṣanf) what is unique to it, i.e., that which distinguishes it from others."[2]

[1] Encyclopédie de l'Islām (Leiden: Brill; Paris: Klincksieck, 1934), s.v. al Sharastānī.

[2] Muḥammad al Shahrastānī, Kitāb al Milal wa al Niḥal, Book of

Although classification of knowledge had long been one of the essential sciences of the medieval period, al Shahrastānī's structural classification of the belief systems of mankind was unique. It could be adapted to allow the inclusion of new elements within the classificatory system at any historical moment, without endangering its basic structure. In order to provide a comprehensive and universal system of classification, al Shahrastānī proceeded gradually from the most general among religious phenomena to the most specific. The basis for classification was the religious factor. In general, each religion, sect, and religious phenomenon was presented as an organic entity; this factor determined the relation between its constituent elements.

This chapter will be devoted to an analysis of Kitāb al Milal wa al Niḥal (Book of Religions and Philosophies), in which al Shahrastānī developed his system of classification. This book represents more than a fine example of the systematic science of religions. It offers a sociologically rooted theory of religion and attempts, without the hesitation characteristic of modern religious studies, to define the nature of religion and to interpret religion in sociological terms as the source of society's organization. The theory of religion and the system of classification are projected through a scientific comparative method which adopts objectivity, freedom from value-judgments, and sympathetic understanding as essential tools for scientific investigation. In presenting al Shahrastānī's methodology for the study

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Religious and Philosophical Sects, ed. with an English introduction by William Cureton (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846), p. 23.

of religions, we shall, whenever necessary, carefully examine current methodological issues. This will help to clarify al Shahrastānī's methodology, and thus contribute towards the modern history of religions.

Analysis will be based on the following editions of Kitāb al Milal wa al Niḥal: 1) Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects, ed. with an English introduction by William Cureton (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846). References will be from this edition, unless otherwise specified. 2) Ṣubayḥ Publishers' five-volume compound edition of Ibn Ḥazm, Al Fiṣal fi al Milal wa al 'Ahwā' wa al Niḥal with Al Milal wa al Niḥal of al Shahrastānī.

Cureton planned an English translation of Al Milal wa al Niḥal. However, this never materialized. Currently, an English translation is being undertaken by A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn in Abr-Nahrain. The first parts appeared in Vol. VIII (1968-69) of Abr-Nahrain.

This section will include my own English translations of quotations from Al Milal wa al Niḥal. To preserve the original context, these translations will be as literal as possible. Arabic terms will be inserted with the English translations when warranted.

The focus of this analysis will be on al Shahrastānī's methodology for the study of religions. Therefore, discussion of his contribution to the study of comparative philosophy, which constitutes the second volume of Al Milal wa al Niḥal, will not be included. Nevertheless, references from the philosophical section of the book will be used when they are relevant to the religious methodology of al Shahrastānī.

I

AL SHAHRASTĀNĪ'S THEORY OF RELIGION

A. Definition and Nature of Religion

An empirical definition of religion must be based on the nature of religious belief and its function as the most important aspect in the life of the individual and his society. The nature of belief, its essential character, determines the definition. This essential character of religion is empirically manifested in the daily life of individuals and groups.

In general terms, the individual will be one of two kinds of believers: either he benefits from someone else's thought, or he is his own benefactor, formulating his own beliefs independent of any external influence. Al Shahrastānī expresses this dichotomy in belief as follows: "When a man holds a certain belief or expresses an opinion, either he benefits from someone else or he is totally independent in his thought."[1] Al Shahrastānī further distinguishes between those who benefit from others' thought and those who are merely imitators. The two types must not be confused: "The person who benefits from someone else could be an imitator who found an agreeable doctrine. His parents or teacher might have held a false belief and he

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[1] p. 24.

just imitates them without considering its truthfulness or falsity, its being right or wrong. In this case [the person] is not benefiting for he did not gain any profit or knowledge and because he did not follow the teacher with understanding and certainty. . . ."[1] On the other hand, the person who is independent in thought "could, if we take into account the foundation and nature of discovery, be someone who has discovered [the opinion he believes in] on the basis of what he has derived [from someone else]. In this case, such a person is not independent in opinion because he obtained knowledge through the benefiting power."[2]

1. The Expressions of Religious Experience: Knowledge, Obedience and Fellowship

This dichotomy in the nature of belief suggests another dichotomy among men, according to the nature of their response to the call of belief. In this regard, the individual is either "obedient" and "submissive" or he is "innovative" and "heretical."[3] A further dichotomy may be distinguished, which will shed light on the nature of religion and the proper manner of its definition. Al Shahrastānī calls the "obedient" and "submissive" man a "religious" person.[4] This epithet is not ascribed to the "innovator" or "heretic." For the sake

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[1] p. 25.

[2] p. 25.

[3] p. 24.

[4] p. 24.

of categorization, we shall characterize the "heretic" as "non-religious." However, we must bear in mind that although al Shahrastānī refrains from calling the "heretic" "religious," he does not necessarily deny that the "heretic" has a belief. He suggests, rather, that what is believed in does not belong to the realm of religion.

In this clear-cut manner, al Shahrastānī proceeds towards the definition which he finds most adequate for religion and which fits its essential character. According to him, "the individual who derives his belief from someone else is submissive and obedient, and religion is obedience and submission."[1] Accordingly, "the obedient man is the religious man, and the man independent in opinion is an innovator and heretic."[2] Thus, submission and obedience are essentially states of mind, aspects of a cognitive process, approving or disapproving responses to an object offered for consideration. The tension between approval and disapproval is lacking in the case of the "heretic" because he believes only in his own findings which have been subjected only to his own power of reasoning.

Thus, religion in the final analysis is knowledge and obedience (maʿrifah wa ṭāʿah).[3] It implies the establishment of a number of precepts the knowledge and acceptance of which depend upon the individual's positive or negative response. Through a linguistic analysis of the word dīn, "religion," al Shahrastānī comes to the conclusion

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[1]p. 24.

[2]p. 24

[3]p. 28

that the term is not a name given intrinsically only to a body of belief, but expresses rather the requirements and consequences of belief. Religion is knowledge which demands an action which is obedience. The term sometimes means "judgment" and this meaning implies reward or punishment; these constitute, linguistically speaking, another two meanings for the term dīn. Thus the term mutadayyin, "religious," designates a committed religious person who is submissive, obedient and who expects judgment with the consequent results of reward or punishment.[1] The various meanings of the term reveal the totality of religious life by expressing both its theoretical and practical levels.

Al Shahrastānī adds a sociological meaning to his definition by describing religion as ṭāᶜah wa inqiyād (obedience and fellowship).[2] While obedience and submission define the response of the individual to the call of the founder, inqiyād describes the relation of the individual not only to the founder but also to other individuals who unconditionally devote themselves to the founder's call. Inqiyād is, thus, to follow with other followers the precepts established by the founder;

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[1]W.C. Smith defines three principal meanings of the word dīn in seventh-century Arabia. First, dīn refers to the concept of "systematic religion." Secondly, there was "a verbal noun 'judging, passing judgment, passing sentence' and along with this, 'judgment, verdict.'" Thirdly, there was "a verbal noun of a verb 'to conduct oneself, to behave, to observe certain practices, to follow traditional usage, to conform.'" From this is derived "the abstract noun 'conformity, propriety, obedience, usage, customs, standard behavior.'" W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Tradition of Mankind (New York: Mentor Books, 1962), pp. 93-94.

[2]p. 25.

to become, then, a part of what Weber would call a "community of followers." Inqiyād is to join others in accepting without hesitation the founder's leadership. Thus inqiyād, from a sociological point of view, implies both the necessity of leadership and a community of followers established around the leadership. To sum up, inqiyād is obedience in fellowship.

This understanding of the nature of religion and religious experience coincides with Wach's analysis of religious experience. Al Shahrastānī's theory is composed of three interrelated elements: ma^crifah, ṭā^cah and inqiyād (knowledge, obedience and fellowship). The individual is first introduced to a body of religious concepts which demands his response. This response is expressed in the individual's acceptance and obedience to the given concepts. The social implications of this obedience are expressed in the act of fellowship, belonging to a community of followers under the leadership of the founder. In the same manner Wach speaks of three expressions of religious experience: the "intellectual," the "practical," and the "sociological," also called "thought," "action" and "fellowship."[1] As he explains: "like all kinds of experience, religious experience tends to expression."[2] Symbols, myths, doctrines, confessions of faith and creeds, dogmas. . . etc.; all these, for Wach, are theoretical expressions of religious experience. The "practical expression" is

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[1]Wach, Types of Religious Experience, p. 45; and The Comparative Study of Religions, p. 65.

[2]Wach, Types of Religious Experience, p. 59.

described by him as: "a total response of the total being -- intense and integral -- to Ultimate Reality, in action."[1] "Devotion" and "service" are the two "principal forms" of this expression.[2] In general, it includes all forms of worship which constitute the religious actions undertaken by the religious person at this stage. Al Shahrastānī, on the other hand, equates ṭā^cah with sharī^cah and sometimes with fiqh (jurisprudence).[3] This equation implies the religious actions as formulated by sharī^cah and fiqh. Obedience manifests itself in the actual fulfillment of religious precepts.

The sociological expression of religious experience, according to Wach, shows religion as a "group affair." As he explains: "in and through the religious act the religious group is constituted. There is no religion which has not evolved a type of religious fellowship."[4] It is interesting to notice that Wach in his analysis of this third expression included the 'Ummah, among his other examples from world religions, as an example of fellowship in religion. He maintains: "Except for certain developments in the modern Western world, there has always been a consciousness of the numinous character inherent in the religious communion, in the primitive cult-group, in the ecclesia, the Kahal, the 'ummah, or the samgha. Only where historical de-

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[1]Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[2]Ibid., p. 98.

[3]p. 28.

[4]Wach, pp. 122-123.

velopments have led to a degeneration in the life of the fellowship and hence to a weakening of this feeling will the rationalist or the mystic or the spiritualist protest against the actual manifestation or even the idea of a communion and community in religion."[1] Likewise, al Shahrastānī maintains that the nature of religion leads to the institution of a jamā^{c}ah (group), i.e., a community of followers whose members share this sense of fellowship (inqiyād). When this process acquires a religious character, the millah (religious community) is the result. The term millah expresses best what Wach meant by the term 'ummah, which he used to indicate a religious group. Al Shahrastānī, however, does not use 'Ummah because, as is well-known, this term includes Muslims and non-Muslims sharing one community, and so it does not refer to a community of followers in the strict religious sense. The concept of 'Ummah may fit Wach's analysis of how a religious group defines its relation to the world at large. In the case of the Islamic millah (the community of followers of Islām), the relation is expressed in the 'Ummah, which might represent a community which is shared by both followers and non-followers. Through the 'Ummah concept, the Islamic millah (community) relates itself to the world at large.

Another point of comparison between Wach and al Shahrastānī has to do with the idea expressed by al Shahrastānī that fellowship assists man in two ways: in providing his living and in preparing him for his final judgment. This is echoed by Wach's notion that "fellowship may

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[1] Ibid., p. 124.

bear eschatological features."[1] However, they differ in their interpretation. Wach thinks of a messianic figure as the "prototype of the true believer."[2] Al Shahrastānī, however, links man's final judgment in a hereafter to the degree of his integration within his community and his relation to other followers;[3] thus, judgment depends on the social involvement of the religious individual. It is in communal action that the religious behavior of the individual is measured.

Despite their disagreement on this last point, both al Shahrastānī and Wach agree that the three expressions of religious experience are intrinsically related. Wach maintains that "the three forms are constitutive, yet only in the context of communion can the intellectual and the practical attain their true meaning."[4] Al Shahrastānī, as we shall explain later, set these three forms in a gradual process and named them al mabda', al wasaṭ and al Kamāl (the start, the middle and the completion). This indicates that beside their being expressions of religious experience, they are at the same time measurements of religious commitment. In the first stage, the individual's commitment is only intellectual. In the middle stage, the individual becomes a believer in the intellectual content, and so he devotes himself unconditionally and with certainty. The stage of perfection is when the

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[1] Wach, p. 138.

[2] Ibid., p. 138

[3] p. 25.

[4] Wach, p. 121.

individual realizes the content of the first two stages in fellowship, that is in society. Thus, while agreeing with Wach on these forms as expressions of religious experience, al Shahrastānī utilizes them as measurements for religious commitment.

By defining religion, al Shahrastānī touches on one of the most controversial issues in the modern study of religion. No single definition of religion is sufficiently comprehensive to be applied universally. The debate on the problem of definition has revealed total disagreement among students of religion. The outcome of such disagreement has been either to give up the attempt to define religion at all, or in a more extreme response, to drop the term altogether. Max Weber and the bulk of social scientists who follow him usually refrain from defining religion, if not altogether, at least at the beginning of their research. The classic expression of this attitude is Weber's often-quoted statement: "To define 'religion,' to say what it is, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study."[1] To most social scientists after Weber, the question of the essence of religion is related to that of definition, and thus the refusal to define religion usually implies a refusal to consider the essence of religion. Weber has expressed this principle too: "The essence of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to

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[1]Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, tr. Ephraim Fischoff, intro. Talcott Parsons (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 1.

study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social behavior."[1]

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, unlike Weber, takes an extremely negative attitude to the definition of religion whether at the start of research or at its end. For him, the term "religion" ought to be dropped because it "is a distorted concept not really corresponding to anything definite or distinctive in the objective world."[2] Smith's attitude towards the problem of the essence of religion is also negative. In his work, he intended "to propose a way of looking at religious phenomena that does not attempt to locate their essence."[3]

Both Weber and Smith are criticized for their negative response to the problems of definition and essence. These criticisms are of two kinds. One is theoretical and exemplified in the arguments given for the necessity of defining religion and locating its essence. The other is practical -- the continuing efforts at new definitions and at shedding more light on the problem of essence. Ronald Robertson is critical of Weber's dictum and he launches his criticism in the following series of questions: "Weber claims that insofar as definition is possible it can be accomplished only after empirical inquiry and discussion. But, we may ask, inquiry into and discussion about what? Second, he speaks of the essence of religion. But is this what is required of a definition

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[1] Ibid., p. 1.

[2] W.C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, p. 21.

[3] Ibid., p. 21.

of religion? Third, Weber refers to religious behavior. But on what grounds can he logically make such reference since he has declined to define it? Our objections to Weber's position are basically that it is impossible to analyze something without having criteria for the identification of that something; and that it is not the essence of religion which we are after, as if there were something 'out there' to be apprehended as 'religious' but rather a sociological definition which will enable us to analyze in the rigorous and consistent manner."[1]

This criticism is also applicable to Smith. Smith's position has been refuted by certain students of religion, including Robert D. Baird. He admits that Smith was right "in concluding that no historical study of the term could give us a definition that would apply to all usages."[2] However, he considers Smith "wrong in dropping the term on that account. For . . . the term 'faith' which he offers in its place, is equally ambiguous."[3] The term "faith," Baird continues, "has also been reified. . . . One could conceivably do what Smith wants to do without dispensing with the word 'religion.' Indeed, he seems to find it difficult to dispense with it entirely. One could simply, if he chose, give to 'religion' the functional definition that Smith gives to 'faith,' and then be on with it."[4] Smith is also criticized by

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[1]Ronald Robertson, The Sociological Interpretation of Religion (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 34.

[2]Robert D. Baird, Category Formation and the History of Religions (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 14.

[3]Ibid., p. 14.

[4]Ibid., p. 105.

I.R. al Fārūqī for his denial of an essence for Islām. According to al Fārūqi "No Muslim thinker has ever denied that his religion has an essence. . . . As for the non-Muslim students of Islām . . . [Wilfred C. Smith] consistently maintained that there is no such essence. He held that there are only Muslims whose Muslimness is a new thing every morn, always changing."[1] "For the investigator," says al Fārūqī, "to flout such an attitude on the part of the religion in question is to commit the reductionist fallacy and hence to vitiate his own feelings. . . ."[2]

By defining an essence of religion, al Shahrastānī departs from both Weber and Smith. By adopting the traditional understanding of religion as obedience, al Shahrastānī focuses on the meanings and implications associated with the definition itself. This definition can be best described as functional insofar as it denotes what the person ought to do to become "religious." Al Shahrastānī uses this functional definition to distinguish between religion and philosophy. The functional aspects of the term "obedience" result in something actual and definite in the life of the religious person. In order to distinguish religion from philosophy, it is essential to decide at the beginning what kind of phenomena are to be regarded as religion. This functional approach is characterized by its freedom from value-judgment. For al Shahrastānī, obedience may make religion an adversary of philosophy but it certainly does not stir the religions against each other. The

[1] I.R. al Fārūqī, "The Essence of Religious Experience in Islām," in Numen, Vol. XX, Fasc. 3, p. 187.

[2] Ibid., p. 186.

forms of beliefs which are not based on the concept of obedience are excluded from the realm of religion and are considered as mere philosophical opinions.

2. Measurements of Religious Commitment

Thus, the category mutadayyin (religious) implies for al Shahrastānī the individual's commitment to carrying out the requirements of his belief. Clearly we can see here the social implications of man's religious belief. In modern sociological language, Charles Y. Glock explains that the consequences which result from the religious commitment of the individual encompass "the secular effects of religious belief, practice, experience, and knowledge on the individual."[1] This includes "all those religious prescriptions which specify what people ought to do and the attitudes they ought to hold as a consequence of their religion."[2] Al Shahrastānī measures in a systematic manner the different degrees of religious commitment among Muslims. His analysis, however, might be applied to men of all religions. The actions, attitudes and behavior of the religious person are measured in order to determine his degree of involvement and his response to the content of religion. Al Shahrastānī defines three degrees or stages of commitment to religion on the part of the individual; a combination of all these would be found in the ideal religious person.

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[1]"The Dimensions of Religious Commitment," in Charles Y. Glock, ed., Religion in Sociological Perspective, Essays in the Empirical Study of Religion (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1973), p. 11.

[2]Ibid., p. 11.

a. Al Mabda' (The Start): Submission

The first stage defined by al Shahrastānī consists of the first action of commitment.[1] This is the acceptance of belief characterized by the external act of submission, to become a "Muslim" in the literal sense of the adjectival form of "muslim." The acceptance of belief may be called the intellectual dimension of this first stage. Al Shahrastānī calls this stage al mabda'[2] meaning literally "the start," indicating the first act of religious commitment. The requirements of this stage include the vocal proclamation of the confession of faith and also the practice of the different rituals commanded by religion which concentrate on prayers, alms-giving, fasting and pilgrimage.[3] This stage is complete, including within its boundaries a theoretical acceptance and declaration of the faith coupled with a practical implementation of the rituals.

Glock explains this dimension as "the expectation that the religious person will be informed and knowledgeable about the basic tenets of his faith and its sacred scriptures."[4] For al Shahrastānī as for Glock, the intellectual dimension is related to the ideological dimension. Glock expresses this relation by stating that "knowledge of a belief is a necessary condition for its acceptance. However, belief

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[1]For a full discussion of the meaning of the term islām, see Jane I. Smith, An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term Islam as Seen in a Sequence of Qurān Commentaries (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).

[2]p. 27.

[3]p. 27.

[4]Glock, p. 11.

need not follow from knowledge nor, for that matter, does all religious knowledge bear on belief."[1] According to al Shahrastānī, the religious person at the start of his religious commitment becomes acquainted with the basic tenets of the belief; however, the ideological dimension comes at a later stage, the "middle" stage, in which the religious person adheres to the beliefs which constitute the ideology of his religion, its theological and philosophical doctrines. This is the stage in which the religious person is known as a "mu'min," that is, a "believer" or a man of faith.

b. Al Wasaṭ (The Middle): Certainty

Al mabda' does not complete a believer's commitment. To be a fully religious person, the believer must go through two further stages. Al Shahrastānī calls the second al Wasaṭ, (the middle), and this stage involves full acceptance of the ideological content of religion.[2] This stage is traditionally known as īmān (faith), in contrast to the first, which is known as islām (submission). In this second stage of religious commitment, the person earlier called muslim is required to believe in the doctrines which constitute the ideational content of what he has already accepted in the first stage. For the Muslim, these doctrines include the belief in God, His angels, His Scriptures, His messengers, in the Day of Judgment and in divine

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[1] Ibid., p. 11.

[2] p. 27.

Providence.[1] The Muslim who believes in all these doctrines is to be called a mu'min (faithful). A modern interpretation of īmān identifies it as "the highest stage of religious certainty." It is not merely "the 'act of believing,' an 'act of faith,' but a state in which religious knowledge produces an intuition of its certainty as a result of the consideration and weighing of all possible alternatives. Here, the subject is wholly determined by the data and his 'will to believe' is nil."[2]

The relation between the two stages lies in that the intellectual aspect of the first constitutes an expression of acceptance exemplified in the act of submission and the fulfillment of rituals. The ideological content of the second stage is also intellectual in that it includes the basic ideational and doctrinal aspects of the religion, which develop the act of submission of the first stage into the realm of belief. It is a gradual movement from the rational acceptance of religion to the rational belief in its doctrines. In this manner, al Shahrastānī combines the intellectual and ritualistic dimensions in the stage he marks as the "start," and keeps the ideological dimension for the "middle" stage in the development of religious commitment.

c. Al Kamāl (The Perfection): Societal Piety or Religion in Action

The most complete form of commitment is that which al Shahrastānī calls al Kamāl (perfection).[3] What is emphasized in this stage is the

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[1]p. 27.

[2]I.R. al Fārūqī, "Islām," in The Great Asian Religions, An Anthology, compiled by Wing-tsit Chan, et al. (London: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 308.

[3]p. 27.

experiential dimension in which a direct knowledge and communication with Reality is sought. This stage is marked by the complete subjective religious experience which is the real culmination of the results sought in the previous stages of islām and īmān. This complete and perfect form or religiosity is traditionally known as iḥsān, a term which al Shahrastānī explains as a combination of islām and īmān (submission and certainty).[1] However, the traditional interpretation of iḥsān, which is also mentioned by al Shahrastānī, clearly points to a subjective quality; the religious person experiences something of Reality, of being involved directly with the full potential of his religious feeling.

Iḥsān, according to this interpretation, is "to worship God as if you see Him."[2] And if this sort of communication, "seeing," is not within the ability of the religious person, it does not make communication impossible because "seeing" is an ever existing element on the part of God. This is expressed in the statement "and if you do not see Him, He sees you," which speaks of the ever-presence of Reality whether the religious person is capable of apprehending it or not. The commitment here is the demand that the religious person should be always aware of Divine Presence, and acknowledge his occasional disability to do so. But when this is done, a perfection of belief and of religious commitment has taken place.

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[1]p. 27.

[2]p. 27.

The term ihsān is given a mystical explanation by Frithjof Schuon who claims that in "the triad traditional in Islām," īmān is "Faith," islām is the "law" and ihsān is the "Way."[1] Literally speaking ihsān means virtue, the essence of which "is 'the remembering of God' actualized through speech on the basis of the first two elements. . . el-ihsān leads these first two back to their essences by the magic of sacred speech, inasmuch as this speech is the vehicle for both intelligence and will."[2]

Schuon translates this traditional definition of ihsān as follows: "Virtue in action (spiritual actualization, el-ihsān) is to adore God as if thou didst see Him, and if thou seest Him not, nonetheless He sees thee."[3] Without giving it a mystical connotation, we can see that the term ihsān indicates a general state of piety which fills the religious man's entire life, personal as well as social. It is the religious man in his actual involvement with life. It is simply to live with the qualities of submission and sincerity as actualized in the life and attitudes of the religious man. It expresses the totality of religious life and commitment without mystifying that totality. Schuon is correct and in agreement with al Shahrastānī when he calls ihsān "the perfection and the final term"[4] of islām and īmān and when he says that

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[1]Frithjof Schuon, Understanding Islām, tr. D.M. Matheson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 15.

[2]Schuon, pp. 15-16.

[3]Ibid., p. 122.

[4]Ibid., p. 156.

ihsān is "at the same time in them and above them."[1] However, the term expresses the totality of religious life but not the totality understood by Schuon in this statement: "It can also be said that there is an ihsān because there is in man something which calls for totality, or something absolute or infinite."[2] This fits Schuon's "theomorphic" interpretation, but not al Shahrastānī's explanation, according to which ihsān means the Islamic way or the total experience of religion, and not just the mystic or the Sūfī way as seen by Schuon. What Schuon missed is that beside the subjective aspect of ihsān, there is the social aspect which concerns the manner in which the religious person acts in his social environment. Mystical experience would be equated with ihsān as social piety only if it included obedience to Sharīcah and fulfilled the social function of religion. Within the structure of al Shahrastānī's system, if these qualities are lacking from mystical experience, then Sufism will be included within the realm of opinions.

The relationship between the three stages of islām, īmān and ihsān in religious commitment is clearly seen in the names given to them, mabda', wasat and kamāl. Firstly, the names denote the gradual nature of religious experience and religious commitment, and secondly, they admit the importance and necessity of all dimensions of religious life. They do not deny the individual whatever he has achieved in this gradual

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[1] Ibid., p. 156.

[2] Ibid., p. 156.

process of becoming religious. Each stage of commitment has its own character and value. The first stage is marked by its external characteristics, the vocal proclamation of faith and the practice of rituals and religious laws. Al Shahrastānī appreciates the disadvantage of this stage, that it may be shared by both the believer and the hypocrite. At the beginning of commitment, one cannot distinguish between who is really committed and who is not: "islām can mean external submission which is shared by both the believer and the hypocrite."[1] And again: "islām, meaning external submission and inqiyād (fellowship) is the point of contact [between the believer and the hypocrite] because it is the start."[2] Elsewhere he adds, "the term 'Muslims' includes both the saved and the perished (al nājī wa al hālik)."[3] When islām is accompanied by sincerity the point of contact which characterizes the first stage vanishes and the believer becomes truly religious.[4] In other words, the intellectually passive first stage turns into "an active search for ways and means of actualizing the truths grasped in īmān."[5] The combination of "submission and sincerity" is perfection.[6] In relation to the belief of the Muslims, iḥsān as the

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[1] p. 27.

[2] p. 27.

[3] p. 27.

[4] p. 27.

[5] Al Fārūqī, "Islām," in The Great Asian Religions, p. 308.

[6] p. 27.

complete form of religious commitment is equivalent to Islām, the religion.[1] Islām, the religion, implies the combination of islām and īmān, resulting in iḥsān, representing the totality of religious experience and commitment. In Islām, iḥsān represents the totality of Islamic life. It has both a personal and a social level. On the personal level it is the full awareness of the external presence of the Divine essence. On the social level, iḥsān means living the Islamic way. It is the reflection of the personal awareness of the Divine presence in the total life of the religious person, in his attitudes, actions and behavior. Iḥsān, then, constitutes the most genuine religious feeling and the highest expression possible of religious experience. With iḥsān, as the consummation of religious belief, we have a full identification of social piety with religion.

There is an implicit similarity between this understanding of iḥsān and what Glock has called the "experiential dimension" of religious commitment. For him, it means that "the religious person will at one time or another achieve direct knowledge of ultimate reality or will experience religious emotion. Included here are all of those feelings, perceptions, and sensations which are experienced by an actor or defined by a religious group as involving some communication, however slight, with a divine essence, i.e., with God, with ultimate reality, with transcendental authority."[2] As Glock explains, the emphasis is placed on

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[1]p. 27.

[2]Glock, p. 10.

"religious feeling as an essential element of religiosity."[1] The focus here is on the "subjective religious experience as a sign of individual religiosity."[2] What is lacking in this interpretation, however, is the social implication of this personal experience. Yet Glock includes it under what he calls the "consequential" dimension which focuses on "the secular effects of religious belief."[3] For al Shahrastānī, however, iḥsān represents a combination of the "experiential" and "consequential" dimensions of religious belief expressing both the personal and social experience of religion.

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[1] Ibid., p. 10.

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

[3] Ibid., p. 11.

3. The Social Function of Religion

a. The Category of Millah (Religious Group or Community): The Role of Religion in Social Organization

Obedience and submission as the essence of religion result in the emergence of a system of fellowship, inqiyād. The religious man is an obedient follower of some founder of belief, Al Shahrastānī explains this inqiyād in sociological language which provides a new perspective on the understanding of the nature of religion. When the religious man is described as obedient and submissive within a system of fellowship, the social significance of his religiosity at once becomes clear. Following a prophet or a religious leader soon turns into a fellowship between one follower and another and relates both to the founder and his system of belief. When this happens, the human need for social grouping is fulfilled.

This is explained in al Shahrastānī's interpretation of the Arabic term millah which designates a religious group, (jamā^{c}ah), known for a special minhāj (way of life), a special shir^{c}ah (law) and a special sunnah (a body of customs and habits). Al Shahrastānī defines the meaning of millah and explains its raison d'être in the following manner: "human beings have a need to gather together (socialize) with others of their own kind in order to sustain their living and prepare themselves for judgment. This gathering ('ijtimā^c) should be of such a

kind as to maintain both the qualities of preservation and cooperation -- tamānu^c wa ta^cāwun; by tamānu^c man keeps what is his own; and by ta^cāwun, he obtains what is not his [what is not in his power to do or possess]. The form of such grouping is millah, and the special minhāj which leads to such a form is the shir^cah (the law) and the sunnah (body of customs). Those who agree on such a sunnah constitute a group."[1]

The use of the word millah, indicating a religious group, requires a definition of its meaning in relation to the general term dīn (religion). It is noticeable that al Shahrastānī frequently uses both terms, in the singular and the plural cases, sometimes to indicate almost the same thing. However, we have noticed that while the term dīn can refer to religion both as a personal system and as a social system, the term millah acquires for al Shahrastānī an exclusively sociological meaning. The two terms are synonymous only when the word dīn acquires the broader meaning of 'Ummah (community). In this sense, one does not see much difference in emphasis between al 'ummah al Islāmiyyah (the Islamic community), and al millah al Islāmiyyah (the Islamic religion), the emphasis being clearly on the social significance of religion.[2]

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[1]pp. 25-26.

[2]In the Qur'ān, and according to classical commentators, in the verses 23:52, 21:92 and 10:19 "ummah" means religion. In a study made by Frederick Mathewson Denny, "ummah" in these passages has "been translated as 'religion,' that is, by the Arabic term millah." See Frederick Mathewson Denny, "The Meaning of 'Ummah in the Qur'ān," in History of Religions, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 61. T. Izutsu, using the reification theory of W.C. Smith, claims that the concept of dīn in its most reified form is a synonym for millah "which is religion as an objective 'thing' in the full

Earlier, however, we explained 'Ummah as denoting the attitude of the Muslims to the world at large. This interpretation still emphasizes 'Ummah as a sociologically significant concept. It is, finally, the social element which gives the three terms, 'ummah, dīn and millah, a common meaning. The title of al Shahrastānī's book makes a clear identification of religions and milal. The repetition of milal after religions has the same implication as niḥal after 'ahwā' (philosophical doctrines). Both milal and niḥal designate the group, whether it is of a religious or philosophical nature.

Al Shahrastānī elsewhere conceives of religion as the source of order in man's life and his community: "Since the species of man needs a social life based on a system (niẓām) and since such a social life is to be realized only through (the establishment) of ḥudūd (injunctions) and 'aḥkām (laws) [which control man's] ḥarakāt (actions) and his mu^{c}āmalāt (dealings), and which set for each person the limits which he cannot exceed, there must exist among people a law imposed by a lawgiver; this explains the laws of God regarding actions and His injunctions concerning the dealings. By these injunctions and laws, differences are eliminated, and socialization ('ijtimā^{c}) and integration ('ulfah) are realized."[1]

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sense of the word, a formal system of creeds and rituals which constitutes the principle of unity for a particular religious community and works as the basis of its social life." See Denny, p. 60.

[1]p. 234.

A theory of the social function of religion has been developed mainly by Robertson Smith, Durkheim, Loisy and Weber. In the modern period in the study of religion, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown has been one of the most important contributors to the issue of the role of religion in the development of human society. In his approach to the study of religions, he developed the theory that "any religion is an important, even essential part of the social machinery, as are morality and law, part of the complex system by which human beings are enabled to live together in an orderly arrangement of social relations. From this point of view we deal not with the origins but the social functions of religions, i.e., the contribution that they make to the formation and maintenance of a social order."[1] For Radcliffe-Brown the study of the social function of religions helps towards the establishment of an impartial study of these religions. According to him "the social function of religion is independent of its truth or falsity"[2] and "religions which we think to be erroneous or even absurd and repulsive, such as those of some savage tribes, may be important and effective parts of the social machinery, and . . . without these 'false' religions social evolution and the development of modern civilization would have been impossible."[3]

When al Shahrastānī defines religious commitment in its first stage as submission (intellectually this involves the acceptance of the

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[1]A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Structure and Function in Primitive Society (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 154.

[2]Ibid., p. 154.

[3]Ibid., p. 154.

Shahādah in Muslim belief and ritualistically the performance of the prescribed religious duties), he has projected the first foundation of social life. The rites as acts of obedience regulate individuals and give their gatherings a certain form even before the individual has become fully certain and sincere in his religious commitment. Radcliffe-Brown has seen the same function of rites in his general theory of religion: "an orderly social life amongst human beings depends upon the presence in the minds of the members of a society of certain sentiments, which control the behavior of the individual in his relation to others. Rites have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of . . . society depends."[1]

The injunctions and laws constitute the values through which a society maintains self-control. Elizabeth K. Nottingham speaks of this role of religion as "help[ing] to promote agreement about the nature and content of social obligations by providing values that serve to channel the attitudes of a society's members and define for them the content of their social obligations. In this role, religion has helped to create systems of social values which are integrated and coherent."[2] On the role of religion in the enforcement of mores and customs in the manner described by al Shahrastānī in the two quotations above, Nottingham

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[1]Ibid., p. 157.

[2]Elizabeth K. Nottingham, Religion and Society (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 13.

asserts that "religion has also played a vital role in supplying the constraining power that underwrites and reinforces custom. In this connection, it should be noted that the attitudes of reverence and respect with which especially binding customs (mores) are regarded are closely akin to the feelings of awe which . . . are evoked by the sacred itself."[1] Al Shahrastānī spoke of two reasons for the socialization of the individual; one is the "preservation of his life,"[2] and the other is "to prepare himself for judgment."[3] It is religion which defines the values which help the individual achieve the first objective and binds them to an ultimate concern which gives them purpose and meaning. Thus the social individual finds an ultimate meaning for his social life. A modern sociological explanation can be found in the words of Nottingham: "When norms occur in a sacred frame of reference, however, they are backed up by sacred sanctions, and in almost all societies sacred sanctions have a special constraining force. For not only human, this-worldly rewards and punishments are involved, but superhuman, other-worldly prizes and penalties as well."[4] Similarly Paul Tillich and R.N. Bellah identify this as the "ultimate concern." In Bellah's words, religion is "a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the

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[1]Nottingham, p. 14.

[2]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 25.

[3]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 25.

[4]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 15.

ultimate conditions of his existence."[1] Bellah quotes the Qur'ān comparing this present world to "vegetation after rain, whose growth rejoices the unbeliever, but it quickly withers away and becomes as straw (57, 19-20)."[2] Bellah uses another quotation from the Qur'ān which states that "Men prefer life in the present world but the life to come is infinitely superior -- it alone is everlasting (87, 16-17)."[3]

The continuing need for such organization is expressed in al Shahrastānī's statement, "And because this socialization as based on organization (<u>'ijtimā^c ^calā niẓām</u>) is essential for the species of man as a matter of necessity, the maintenance of the thing needed (societal life based on organization) is a necessity, for example in the relation existing between the rich and the poor, the giver and the asker, the King and his subjects; if people were all Kings there would be no need for a King, and, similarly, if they were all subjects there would be no kingdom."[4] The last statements in this quotation are echoed by Radcliffe-Brown's term, the "sense of dependence." He explains that "what keeps a man a social animal is not some herd instinct, but the sense of dependence in the innumerable forms that it takes."[5] Man does not only derive "comfort" and "succour" from his society but he also has

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[1]R.N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," in Sociology of Religion, ed. R. Robertson (N.Y.: Penguin, 1969), p. 263.

[2]Bellah, p. 264.

[3]Ibid., p. 265.

[4]p. 234.

[5]Radcliffe-Brown, p. 176.

to submit to its control. Radcliffe-Brown holds that, by "maintaining this sense of dependence," religions perform their social function."[1] To complete our analysis of al Shahrastānī's anticipation of modern thinkers on this point, we may cite Thomas F. O'Dea. O'Dea speaks of "a process of differentiation that occurs within the religious group" which makes it a necessity from the beginning to have "followers and leaders."[2]

It is the social concern of religion which distinguishes it from philosophy. The purpose of laws and injunctions is to provide system and order to the life of the individual, a need which is not fulfilled by philosophy. This is nevertheless the objective of some philosophies, but it remains purely theoretical and never finds application in men's life: "The laws (sharā'i^c, plural of sharī^{c}ah) and their founders are concerned with public welfare. The injunctions and laws, the legal and illegal, are established norms. The founders of laws are men who possess rational wisdom and who may be supported by proofs from God in establishing regulations and in defining what is legal and what is not for the public interest of the people (maṣlaḥat al ^{c}ibād) and for the urbanization of societies (^{c}imāratan li al bilād)."[3]

In the final analysis, the principle of obedience and the system of fellowship developed from it characterize the nature of religion. The religious person, as we showed above, is an obedient follower; his

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[1] Ibid., p. 177.

[2] Thomas F. O'Dea, The Sociology of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 49.

[3] p. 201.

religiosity is manifested in his total submission to the will of his teacher and his teacher's system of belief. The philosopher, however, develops his own opinions; the "sense of dependence" is completely lacking. Philosophy is a theoretical formulation of individualistic opinions which does not require the follower's submission, and so it does not require a practical application in the individual's life. Al Shahrastānī sees the difference between the prophet and the philosopher in social terms. The philosopher seeks knowledge and happiness for their own sake.[1] And so wisdom may be either theoretical or practical. Knowledge of truth is theoretical, while doing good is practical. Prophets are concerned with practical wisdom.[2] While the goal of the philosopher is to understand the universe through his reasoning and imitate the God of Truth as far as he can, the prophet seeks to understand "the system of the universe in order to measure on the basis of this understanding the public welfare of the people (maṣāliḥ al ᶜāmmah) in order to preserve the organization of the world (niẓām al ᶜālam) and to regulate the affairs of the subjects (maṣāliḥ al ᶜibād)."[3] This system can be preserved only through laws, declared by the founders of religions with tempting exhortations (targhīb) to obedience and menacing warnings (tarhīb) of the consequences of disobedience.[4] Thus, maᶜrifah, the theoretical content of religion, results in a practical system with

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[1] p. 252.

[2] p. 252.

[3] p. 252.

[4] p. 252.

social implications. The ma^{c}rifah of the philosopher, however, does not lead to a system of fellowship. Independence of opinion does not lead to the creation of a group with the sense of dependence between its individuals.

Accordingly, religion and philosophy differ in matters pertaining to knowledge.[1] As we showed earlier, the knowledge of the religious man is derivative in the sense that he receives it from a religious leader, a prophet in most cases. The man of opinion is "innovator" and independent in his thought. This difference marks the two ways of acquiring knowledge: the way of sharī^{c}ah and the way of reason. Al Shahrastānī's version of this classic problem depicts the philosophers as people who "depend on sound innate quality, perfect reason and pure intuition."[2] They usually use their own reasoning for the establishment of rational laws upon which they "base their livelihood,"[3] rejecting the laws enjoined by revelation and prophecy. They all depend on their reasoning power, but they use it to attain different degrees of perfection in knowledge.

Medieval thinkers made use of the social function of religion as a distinction between religion and philosophy. The argument was even used sometimes to reduce the tension between the two disciplines and

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[1] p. 201.

[2] p. 201.

[3] p. 25.

bring harmony between them. Ibn Rushd's Faṣl al Maqāl fīmā bayna al Ḥikmah wa al Sharīᶜah mina al 'Ittiṣāl[1] was the most noted work on such harmony. Etienne Gilson explains Ibn Rushd's emphasis on the social function of religion as follows: "no conflicts should arise between a faith which keeps its own place and a philosophy which is intelligent enough to realize the specific function of religion."[2]

About Ibn Rushd's understanding of the nature of religion, Gilson states: "As most of the philosophers, he wanted social order, that he himself might philosophize in peace, and he knew full well that men could not possibly be civilized by merely being taught some abstract code of social ethics. In other words, Averroes did not consider religion as merely a rough approximation to philosophic truth. It was for him much more. It had a definite social function that could not be fulfilled by anything else, not even philosophy."[3]

The best modern example of distinguishing philosophy from religion on the basis of this social function is given by Karl Jaspers. For him, "religion has its cult" and "is bound up with a peculiar community of men, arising from the cult."[4] In contrast, philosophy "knows no cult, no community led by a priesthood, no existent invested with a sacred character and set apart from other existents in the world. What

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[1]Arabic text is edited by George F. Hourani (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1959).

[2]Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1938, 1966), p. 40.

[3]Ibid., p. 50.

[4]Karl Jaspers, The Perennial Scope of Philosophy, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 84.

religion localizes in a specific place can for philosophy be present everywhere and always. Philosophy is a product of the individual's freedom, not of socially determined conditions, and it does not carry the sanction of a collectivity. . . . Men take it from a free tradition and transform it as they make it their own. Although pertaining to man as man, it remains the concern of individuals."[1]

George F. Thomas, using almost the same linguistic patterns as al Shahrastānī, explains the difference as follows: "The primary aim of philosophy is the attainment of knowledge for its own sake, while the primary aim of religion is a living relationship with that which is regarded as the ultimate source of meaning and value in life. In other terms, the primary aim of philosophy is theoretical, truth, while the primary aim of religion is fullness of life."[2] The philosopher, for Thomas, has a secondary aim which is practical and that is "the attainment of the good insofar as it depends upon knowledge of the truth."[3] The religious man, also, has a secondary aim which is theoretical: "Knowledge of the truth in order that he may worship the true God rather than an idol."[4] He again marks the main distinction thus: "the primary aim of one is truth, of the other, life."[5]

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[1]Jaspers, p. 84.

[2]George F. Thomas, Philosophy and Religious Belief (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 3.

[3]Ibid., p. 3.

[4]Ibid., p. 3.

[5]Ibid., p. 3.

Al Shahrastānī expresses his own view in regard to the two groups by stating: "those who accept legal rules accept accordingly the rational laws. The opposite is not true."[1] This is to say that the "people of religions" combine both sources of knowledge while "the people of opinions" are satisfied with their established rational laws. The words al mustabiddūn and al mustafīdūn replace, for al Shahrastānī, the classic terms reason and revelation. With him the controversy of reason and revelation is traced back to its real roots, namely obedience. By using the expressions "mustafīd" and "mustabidd," he focuses on the principle of obedience as the essence of religion, and contrasts it with the independent approach of philosophy whose critical nature does not accept anything unless it is first subjected to severe scrutiny and analysis.

B. The Founder and Charismatic Leadership

Defining religion as inqiyād (fellowship) directly implies the necessity of leadership. Al Shahrastānī focuses attention on the social significance of the founder of a certain system of belief, whether he is a prophet or merely a teacher or a preacher of religion. He maintains that it is impossible to imagine the organization of such a jamāᶜah (group) in the manner he describes without a charismatic founder. He sees this leader as ordained by God and usually supported by signs and proofs: "The establishment of millah and the legislation of the law

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[1]p. 25.

cannot be imagined without a founder (Wāḍiᶜ) and a lawgiver (shāriᶜ) who is honored by God through signs which prove his truthfulness. [These signs] may be included within his message or they may be associated with it or they may appear at a later stage."[1] According to W. Montgomery Watt's analysis of the conception of charismatic leadership in Islām, the figure of the founder is essentially a charismatic leader as Watt explains: "In Islām in the figure of the founder, Muḥammad, there is clearly a charismatic leader, in whom the aspects of the King and the prophet are obvious."[2] The term King refers, in sociological terms, to the political aspect of leadership. Watt, however, reserves the qualities of charismatic leadership only to the Prophet, otherwise the concept is regarded as not founded in the Qur'ān: "Yet, though Muḥammad was in fact a charismatic leader, marked out by the receiving of supernatural communications, the conception of the charismatic leader had little part in the Qur'ānic system of ideas."[3] Watt replaces the conception of charismatic leadership with the conception of the charismatic community: "this concept has been present, and has been of great importance in the development of Islām. It is a commonplace that there is a strong feeling of brotherhood between Muslims; and brotherhood implies common membership of a community. From this observed fact of brotherly

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[1]p. 26.

[2]W. Montgomery Watt, "The Conception of the Charismatic Community in Islam" in Numen VII, Fasc. 1 (January 1960), p. 78.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 78

feeling, one is justified in arguing to the importance of the conception of the community."[1]

Al Shahrastānī's description as quoted above coincides with Max Weber's analysis which describes the prophet as "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment."[2] For Weber there is no distinction "between a renewer of religion" who preaches an older revelation (actual or supposititious) and a founder of religion "who claims to bring completely new deliverances. The two types merge into one another."[3] Usually a prophet establishes his authority with what Weber calls "charismatic authentication"; this is true especially of "the bearer of new doctrine."[4] As to the function of the prophet as a lawgiver, Weber sees the "transition from the prophet to the legislator" as "fluid."[5] By "legislator" he means "a personage who in any given case has been assigned the responsibility of codifying a law systematically or of reconstituting it."[6] The legislator's function is to create a new social order. For al Shahrastānī, the function of such a founder as prophet-legislator is to interpret the prescribed law; for this the title

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[1]Ibid., p. 79.

[2]Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion (Boston: The Beacon Press, 5th printing, 1969), p. 46.

[3]Ibid., p. 46.

[4]Ibid., p. 47.

[5]Ibid., p. 49.

[6]Ibid., p. 49.

lawgiver is ascribed to him. He is the organizer of a group and it is through his explanation of laws and precepts that integration and order are brought about and differences between individuals are reconciled. Leadership is to be maintained as long as the need for order exists. And because the life of the founder will come to an end, the task of order and organization must be undertaken by the religious leaders of his society. Those leaders are mainly the "scholars" of the society because the need for order and organization springs from the interpretation of the injunctions and principles of the law which regulate man's activities and dealings.[1]

From al Shahrastānī's analysis, leadership after any prophet is essentially based on knowledge of the law and its interpretation. After the prophet, law is the source of order, and so the religious leader is a legislator and his leadership depends on his ability to interpret the law. For this reason, it is the scholars (ᶜUlamā') of a community who inherit leadership from the prophets.[2] The scholars may be equated to what Weber called the "specialists." Talcott Parsons explains this concept as follows: "The concept of religious community is that of a collectivity with a distinctive religious character, which is not a society, but rather a religiously specialized sub-group within a society,

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[1]p. 234.

[2]Watt maintains that in the case of Islām, "The prophet was necessary to found the Islamic community, but once that community had been founded, there was no compelling need for a leader with the same charismata as Muḥammad. The Islamic community as a whole was content with a caliph who had succeeded only to the political functions of Muhammad." Watt, p. 78. Al Shahrastānī considers the ᶜālim as a successor to the prophets. However, one of the conditions of Khilāfah is knowledge.

a 'sect' or a 'church.'"[1] The only distinction that we see between al Shahrastānī's ᶜUlamā' and Weber's "specialists" is that with al Shahrastānī the ᶜUlamā' do not constitute a sect or a church within the community. Rather, they represent the religious and political powers since they inherit the knowledge of the prophet: "Knowledge is inherited, but not prophecy. Sharīᶜah is the will of the prophets and the scholars are the heirs of the prophets."[2] When knowledge is transferred from prophets to scholars, charisma is also transferred. However, the scholar's charisma is in proportion to his knowledge; he has no supernatural power and performs no miracles. The ᶜUlamā' are revered only for their intellectual capacity in interpreting the law.

Thus it can be said that both intellectual and political powers are prerequisite for the successorship of the prophets.

[1]Talcott Parsons, in the introduction to Weber's The Sociology of Religion, p. xxxvii.

[2]p. 234.

II

THE SECTS: AN INTERPRETATION OF THEIR EMERGENCE

From the foregoing, it is clear that al Shahrastānī emphasized the concept of obedience and considered it the most fitting definition for religion. In the light of this, the social function of religion has become clear, namely its role in the establishment of laws which give order to the individual's life within society. Obedience has also been used to mark the distinction between religion and philosophy. Through that same concept of obedience, al Shahrastānī explores the phenomenon of sects, the circumstances which lead to their rise, the role they play within religion, and their effect on society as a whole.

1. The Sect, A Repeated Pattern in History

Al Shahrastānī begins the discussion of the phenomenon of sects with a historical remark in which he traces the phenomenon back to its early origins: "the third introduction [concerns] the elaboration of the first misconceptions (shubhāt) which happened in creation, their origin at the beginning and their manifestations at the end."[1] This defines the phenomenon of sects as a result of a state of doubt or misunderstanding. The problem might therefore be classified, at least in its early

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[1]p. 5.

stages, as a problem of knowledge and its interpretation.

The first misconception was Satan's. Its causes are thought by al Shahrastānī to be, firstly, Satan's dependence on his own opinion in matters related to the interpretation of God's Commandments, secondly, his "choice of his own will in objecting and refusing the command," and thirdly, his "arrogance and haughtiness as to the substance from which he was created," namely fire.[1] It is clear that these three causes are related to the concept of obedience. Satan's violation caused his departure from the realm of religion. By following his own reasoning instead of the commands of God, he entered the realm of opinions. From this first misconception, al Shahrastānī derives the "seven misconceptions,"[2] which find their way into the minds of people and provoke doctrines of heresy and innovation.

Al Shahrastānī considers the seven questions raised by Satan as the foundation of all heresy and innovation in history. Accordingly,

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[1]p. 5.

[2]These problems are: 1) What was the wisdom of God's creation of Satan if He knew what would happen because of Satan? 2) Why must Satan know and obey God, since his obedience or disobedience would be neither of benefit nor harm? 3) Why must Satan obey Adam and prostrate himself before him, if he is obedient to God and knows Him? 4) Why did God damn Satan and expel him from Paradise simply because he refused to prostrate himself before Adam? 5) Why did God permit Satan to re-enter Paradise to tempt Adam and bring about his expulsion? 6) Why did God let Satan tempt Adam's children, when He might have made them pure and obedient? 7) Why does God allow evil to exist in the world if He is capable of overcoming it?

According to the "Gospel commentator," Al Shahrastānī claims, the angels in their reply emphasized the necessity of sincere obedience, a quality which Satan lacked. Raising such questions is itself a sign of disobedience. pp. 6-7.

the great heresies will be seven in number, and so will the number of the great sects, regardless of the differences in expressions and methods.[1] These are the "seeds" of all sectarian tendencies and they all can be traced back to the concept of obedience as the essence of religion.[2] Disobedience lies behind the opposition raised against all the prophets with no particular difference between the ancients and the moderns.[3] It all goes back to the desire to reject all laws.

In his analysis, al Shahrastānī attempts to give a historical explanation for the existence of the sects. Differing from modern sociological studies of the phenomenon, al Shahrastānī tries to find a religious answer for its existence in the religious traditions of the world. He tries to trace its origin to the common theological concept of evil. From this concept, al Shahrastānī derives a philosophical theory of the phenomenon of sects as a repeated historical pattern. If we try to formulate this theory, we may say that the founder of every major religion is faced with protests ('i^{c}tirāḍāt)[4] from some segment of his community. These protests, which are initially made by individual persons, develop from mere objections against the activities of the founder to take the shape of a group of people with a different ideology.

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[1]p. 7.

[2]p. 7.

[3]p. 8.

[4]p. 10.

These objections are the "seeds" for the emergence of misconceptions which later develop into sects.[1] This phenomenon of protest (<u>'i^c^tirāḍ</u>) and its development into sects is considered by al Shahrastānī a normative pattern in history. It is repeated with almost all founders or propagators of new ideas.

By establishing this norm, al Shahrastānī agrees with Bryan Wilson's statement that "At first glance, sects may appear to be marginal and incidental phenomena in history -- odd groups of alienated men with outlandish ideas. Yet, at times, sects have had an immense significance for the course of history."[2] Wilson, however, speaks of sects in terms of significance in history. Al Shahrastānī focuses on the sects as a sociological phenomenon which repeatedly takes the same course. However, we see that the two men agree on protest as the definition of sects as religious movements.

Despite his religio-historical interpretation of the phenomenon of sects, al Shahrastānī does not deviate from the sociological standpoint which takes the sects for what they are. His interest derives from a wish to discuss and describe them rather than to refute their mistaken opinions. This implies the acceptance of the phenomenon as a fact which has to be known. Al Shahrastānī, in fact, goes further than that. He begins his work on the sects with a severe criticism of earlier works on the subject; he calls for the establishment of a "new

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[1] p. 10.

[2] Bryan Wilson, <u>Religious Sects</u> (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 7.

rule" for the study of sects. Earlier writers concerned themselves mainly with the gathering of historical information about the subject and failed to formulate a theory for the study of the basic differences between the sects; their evaluation of the sects was, of course, prejudiced. Al Shahrastānī's call reminds us of Wilson's call for a new "sociology of sects." "A sociology of sects, however, requires more than a collection of historical and contemporary data about the numerous individual movements. It requires a conceptual apparatus by which we recognize the central features of sects and significant differences among them."[1]

The fact that al Shahrastānī discusses the religious sects under the religions they branch from indicates that these sects are not separate entities which work in total separation from the established order. If this interpretation is correct, then al Shahrastānī's understanding of the sects differs from that which prevails among many sociologists who follow Max Weber and Ernest Troeltsch in using a Christian understanding of the difference between Church and sect. The church-sect distinction explains the sects in terms of their attitude towards the surrounding society. This attitude is mostly described as one which does not accept the social order; it "is one of avoidance and may be characterized by aggression or indifference."[2] Sects are detached

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

[2] Michael Hill, A Sociology of Religion (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 53-54.

from the world and "in opposition to established social institutions."[1] Wilson also classifies sects according to their "response to the world," but without stressing the contrast between church and sect.[2] Al Shahrastānī's analysis of the nature of the sects does not reflect the church-sect dichotomy and as such it is more applicable to other religious traditions, including Christianity.

2. Relation of the Sect to Orthodox Belief: Two Hermeneutical Principles

From this general exposition, al Shahrastānī proceeds to discuss how the sects developed. It is noticeable that while the names given to these sects are derived from the Islamic tradition, al Shahrastānī nevertheless generalizes the phenomenon so that they may apply to all religious traditions. He is supported in this by the fact that most of the names of Islamic sects are conceptual; they represent a general idea which could be found in any form of religion. In his analysis, he distinguishes two major principles which define a sect's relation to the original belief. The first principle is ghuluww--exaggeration, excess or extravagance, mainly in interpreting the content of the original belief. The second principle is taqṣīr -- falling short, or inadequacy in interpretation. It implies that the interpreter has missed the right understanding and has fallen short in his attempt at interpretation.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 54.

[2] B.R. Wilson, "A Typology of Sects," in Sociology of Religion, ed. Ronald Robertson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 363.

[3] p. 8.

For al Shahrastānī, ghuluww springs from the attempt to "make the mind rule in realms beyond its control by acting as the creator in creation."[1] It is the attempt to play the role of God in His creation, or to give man an equal status with God. From this error of exaggeration, the doctrines of incarnation, transmigration of souls and anthropomorphism have developed.[2] To these are added the beliefs of extremists among the Rāfiḍah "who exaggerated the status of a human being by giving him the attributes of God."[3] These doctrines are characterized by ascribing to man qualities which do not match his nature and raising him out of the realm of humanity into the realm of supernatural power.

Taqṣīr is the other extreme. It is to describe something by terms inadequate to its true nature, and al Shahrastānī explains it as the attempt to "make the mind rule in realms beyond its control by giving creation the status of the Creator."[4] It is exactly the opposite of ghuluww in that it ascribes to God qualities and attributes which are human. In other words, it falls short of proper interpretation by reducing God to the status of man. Through taqṣīr were developed the doctrines of the Qadariyyah,[5] the Jabriyyah[6] and the Mujassimah.[7] What

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[1]p. 8.

[2]p. 8.

[3]p. 8.

[4]p. 8.

[5]This sect adopted the concept of man's free-will and his authorship of his own acts. See Wensinck, p. 52.

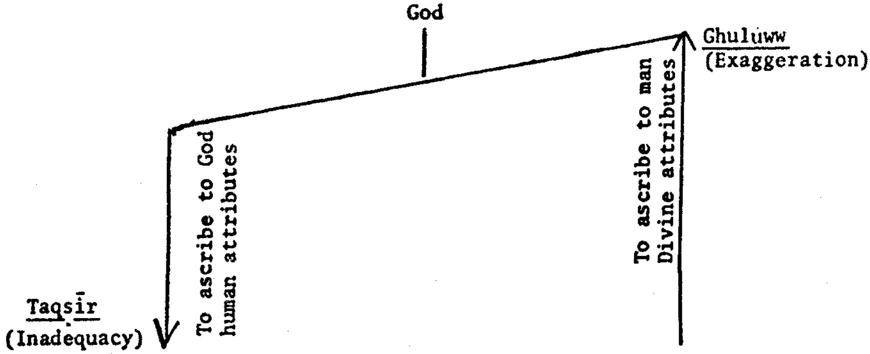
[6]Deniers of free-will.

[7]Anthropomorphists.

characterizes them in contrast to the first group is their "inadequacy in ascribing to God the attributes of the creatures."[1] The following diagram illustrates ghuluww and taqṣīr as a hermeneutical scale.

Ghuluww and Taqṣīr as a Hermeneutical Scale

God: An Example



The two principles of ghuluww and taqṣīr are understood as reductional devices through which the mind of their advocates pictures God and determines a relation between Him and man. For al Shahrastānī, these two representations of the relation of man to God do not express the true God, mainly because they reduce either God to man or man to God. Al Shahrastānī criticizes the misuse of reason in the attempt to create forms of God which are non-real insofar as they do not represent Him

[1]p. 8.

truly. Ghuluww and taqṣīr are non-real representations of God because they either overestimate reason or underestimate it: "to activate the mind in the realm of the Inaccessible . . . this is to liken God to creation or creation to God."[1] Both situations are liable to create non-real representations. For al Shahrastānī, therefore, the doctrines of incarnation, metamorphosis, anthropomorphism, man's freedom of action or predestination, all are non-real forms because they are excessive creations of man's mind. What this criticism amounts to is that religion must be taken as essential and not secondary to understanding. The use of mind, then, should reflect what the religious data imply in their "immediate phenomenality" to use a phenomenological description. This is not a critique of mind per se, but a statement of the necessity for mind to remain in touch with realities of religion. In order that mind does not go astray and create representations which are far from the reality of religion, it must be subjected to an inward reduction of itself (if we take taqṣīr and ghuluww as two examples of non-real representations of the mind).

This is where ghuluww and taqṣīr turn out to be radically positive for al Shahrastānī. Instead of regarding them as misleading in matters pertaining to interpretation of religious data, he uses them as touchstones of reality. This is not to say that it is through the non-real that we reach the real representation. Al Shahrastānī, as a historian of religions, takes the existence of such representations as matters

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[1]p. 8.

of facts believed by certain groups around him, religious as well as philosophical. But his phenomenological mind tells him that these representations are states of mind created by man in order to relate to the "Inaccessible." Being creations of the mind does not necessitate that they represent "phenomenal reality" as explicated by religion. As a question of phenomenological seeing, al Shahrastānī says rather ironically that "each one of (these two groups) is one-eyed with the one he wishes among his two eyes."[1] Thus, they must be subjected to a phenomenological reduction which brings them back to reality. Each is subjected to a reduction towards the center:

ghuluww ————→ • ←———— *taqṣīr*

inward reduction towards the center | inward reduction towards the center

In this manner, the positive quality of *taqṣīr* and *ghuluww* appears. They are the scale which measures the diversity to which the interpretation of facts can go, and this scale indicates the process through which the counter-reduction towards the center must take. The counter-reduction is also a state of mind, but it is the mind which knows and acknowledges its limitations, which finds a way between *ghuluww* and *taqṣīr*. As two hermeneutical principles, they lead us from their extremes to a center or a middle way which reveals reality as "phenomenality." For al Shahrastānī, "the human soul is equipped to an extent which it does not surpass, and each mind has a limit which it does not exceed. . . . The human soul is capable of perfection through theory and action,

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[1]p. 8.

and total perfection is in the proper use of these two powers, the theoretical and the practical."[1] He again states: "Know that the human soul is an essence which is the origin of [all powers]. . . . It motivates the person by will and not by natural inclination. . . . The honor is in the use of each of these powers for the purpose it was created for, commanded with and was made able to fulfill."[2]

Accordingly, the mind can reach a correct knowledge of things if it does not exceed its limitations and fall into ghuluww or taqṣīr. This view runs counter to what a modern philosopher of religion, Henry Duméry, thinks of the function of the mind in its attempt to know God. The God of reason, Duméry believes, could never be the true God. Jean Danielou explains Duméry's concept in the following manner: "Reason must in turn be criticized. . . . Indeed in its effort to reduce and to unify, it risks conceiving God as nothing more than the universal principle of intelligibility. . . . The true God can never be treated as an object of reason. He is sovereign subjectivity. He is also beyond all that the mind conceives him to be."[3] For Duméry "religious structures . . . are the creation of the human mind, creations by which it aspires to the inaccessible one."[4] We can understand ghuluww and taqṣīr as religious

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[1]pp. 221, 210.

[2]pp. 218, 222.

[3]Jean Danielou, "Phenomenology of Religions and Philosophy of Religion," in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, p. 68.

[4]Ibid., p. 70.

structures created by the human mind to express knowledge about God. However this is no reason to condemn the human mind as such. Ghuluww and taqṣīr are two examples of the misuse of reason, when it does not reflect the reality of religion.[1]

[1]p. 8.

3. The Rise of Islamic Sects: A Case Study

The categories of ghuluww and taqṣīr are applied by al Shahrastānī to the Muslim sects. Al Muᶜtazilah are called by him "the anthropomorphists of actions" and the Mushabbihah are those who adopt the "incarnation of attributes."[1] Both fall short in likening the Creator to His creation for they imply that "the good which God does is that which we do as good and the bad which He does is that which we do as bad."[2] Here God is likened to His creation. Al Shahrastānī judges the tendency to ascribe to God the attributes of creatures or to ascribe to creatures the attributes of God as a "deviation from reality."[3]

To ask for the cause in everything is to repeat the act of Satan. This is what the Qadariyyah did. The Khawārij also committed a similar action by denying the judgment of men. For al Shahrastānī, it is similar to Satan's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam, which is a denial of Adam's dominion and judgment.[4] Again, ghuluww is ascribed to al Muᶜtazilah; their concept of Unity was so extreme that they denied all attributes.[5] The Mushabbihah, however, fell short by attributing

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[1] p. 8.

[2] p. 8.

[3] p. 8.

[4] p. 9.

[5] p. 9.

corporeal qualities to God. The Rāfiḍah also exaggerated their concepts of prophecy and Imāmah to the extent of accepting incarnation. The Khawārij fell short by denying the judgment of men.[1]

All these, al Shahrastānī emphasizes, are phenomenal manifestations of the original misconceptions of Satan. This is also why the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet liken each of these sects to another sect from the past. Al Shahrastānī lists some of these: "the Qadariyyah are the Magians of the 'Ummah," "the Mushabbihah are the Jews of this 'Ummah" and "the Rāfiḍah are its Christians."[2] Sectarianism is, thus, a repeated pattern in history with no essential change between what happened in ancient times and what happens now or in the future.[3] "The misconceptions of ancient times are themselves the misconceptions of modern times."[4] This phenomenon is not to be seen only in the long course of history, but also within "the life of a single prophet or founder of a religion and a sharīᶜah."[5] It can be pointed out that "the

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[1] p. 9.

[2] p. 9.

[3] This reminds us of Arnold Toynbee's view of history. He sees recurring patterns of relationships between historical events. Each of these events is particular in itself but at the same time linked to a universal pattern which is inherent in history. Toynbee suggests that if human history repeats itself, "it does so in accordance with the general rhythm of the universe; but the significance of this pattern of repetition lies in the scope it gives for the work of creation to go forward . . . The repetitive element in history reveals itself as an instrument for freedom of creative action, and not as an indication that God and man are the slaves of fate." Arnold Toynbee, Civilization on Trial, and the World and the West (Cleveland: The World Pub. Co., 8th printing, 1967), p. 44.

[4] p. 9.

[5] p. 9.

misconceptions which will happen at the end of (a prophet's) time derive from those developed by his opponents at the beginning of his time."[1] And if that is difficult to document from ancient history because of the difference in time between us and them, "it is clear in the 'Ummah that its misconceptions originate in those of the hypocrites during the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him."[2]

For al Shahrastānī, religious history is associated all the time with a repeated phenomenon of protest or disobedience which we might designate as a history of sects in contrast to a history of religions. The distinction is not a distinction between two realms of existence, the sacred and the secular. It is rather a distinction between relevant and irrelevant interpretations of a single realm of existence which includes both the secular and the sacred. The word sharīᶜah, sometimes shirᶜah, means for al Shahrastānī a way of life in which the unity of human existence is exemplified.

For al Shahrastānī there is no history of sects if there is no history of religions from which it derives its origin and content. The repetition of the phenomenon of sects is a reflection of a larger repetition, of the development of religions, one after the other. The repetition reveals an essential pattern which manifests itself in history in different periods of time and under different conditions. However, each

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[1] p. 9.

[2] p. 10.

repetition is centered on a single fact essential to the nature of religion: religions occur in order to affirm the essence of religion on the basis of fitrah[1] (innate nature). The history of religions is thus seen as the return to an original simple and integrated form. The repetition is a historical affirmation of one original pattern which, in the history of religions, progresses toward its full realization.

The history of sects in relation to the history of religions resembles in some way Arnold Toynbee's concept of "the internal proletariat." For Toynbee, according to J.V.L. Casserley's explanation, "every civilization known to history includes a vast number of members who are physically within the area of the civilization, who are essential to it because they work for it, but who spiritually do not belong to it, who do not participate at all events in its higher values. They belong to its body but not to its spirit. They are part of it materially, but not part of it metaphysically."[2] In al Shahrastānī's scheme the sects are integrally related to the religions they branch from, but they deviate in some form or another from the general spirit of these religions. Historically, this relation is emphasized through the interpretation of the sects' roots as originating from events that usually take place during the founder's time. For semantic reasons the sects cannot be understood in isolation from each other or in isolation from the original belief.

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[1]p. 26.

[2]J.V. Longmead Casserly, Towards a Theology of History (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 59.

Al Shahrastānī frequently starts with reporting the system of belief of the founder and then follows it with the sects derived from it.[1]

The rise of Islamic sects, in al Shahrastānī's view, originated in differences between the Prophet and his opponents. Their early appearance was manifested in the early acts of disobedience to the Prophet. Originally, his opponents "did not accept his judgment when he was commanding and forbidding."[2] They "applied their reason to realms beyond its sphere and they asked about what they were commanded not to ask; and they debated on issues that may not be debated."[3] Al Shahrastānī documents his theory by reporting some of the events that happened during the life of the Prophet and which were developed later on to constitute the main body of the sects in Islām. We need not

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[1]According to John Taylor, "the movements and doctrines defined as 'heterodox' are fundamentally related to the 'orthodox' and cannot be understood in isolation." This "inter-relatedness of 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' history" is seen by Taylor as a positive relation: "in resisting the equation of sect with heresy one is preserving what can be the most effective power for reform. . . . Within the ultimate unity of its initiating faith, the history of a religious tradition is as full of diversity, even perversity, as the men who strive to achieve the faith. To disregard the existence of this constructive diversity and destructive perversity 'within the fold' is to deceive oneself." This positive relation is seen in the general attitude towards the sects themselves in Islamic history. Taylor states that "Even if only one of the seventy-three (sects) was conceded to be 'orthodox,' there was still the sense that the sectarian was not an undeterminate quantity in outer darkness but rather a recognized contributor within Islamic history." See John Taylor, "An Approach to the Emergence of Heterodoxy in Mediaeval Islam," in Religious Studies, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 197, 199.

[2]p. 10.

[3]p. 10.

repeat these events to note, as al Shahrastānī observed, that the questions raised were related to free-will and pre-destination, God's essence and His actions.[1]

Other differences occurred during the Prophet's illness and right after his death. These were "differences in individual interpretations of the tenets of faith . . . for the purpose of the establishment of the principles of legislation and the maintenance of the ways of religion."[2] These differences left an "impact on the status of religion" raised mainly "for the maintenance of the principles of religion" at a time of crisis following the death of the Prophet, and during the consequent "change of affairs."[3] The Prophet's death brought about many disagreements, most importantly ᶜUmar's dictum that "Muḥammad was raised to Heaven in the way Jesus was raised" and Abū Bakr's correction of ᶜUmar.[4] There were also disagreements about where to bury the Prophet, whether in Makkah or in al Madīnah or in Jerusalem.[5]

The "greatest point of disagreement" according to al Shahrastānī, took place over the question of the <u>'Imāmah</u>: "No fighting ever took place in history over a religious principle such as that which happened

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[1]p. 10.

[2]p. 11.

[3]p. 11.

[4]p. 11.

[5]p. 12.

over the 'Imāmah."[1] A similar disagreement took place between al Muhājirūn and al Anṣār over the issue of who would succeed the Prophet. This issue, however, was settled very peacefully.[2] Other points of disagreement were raised over the issues of the inheritance of the Prophet; whether those who refused to pay the Zakāt were to be fought against; ᶜUmar's succession of Abū Bakr; the injunction against certain crimes not mentioned in the Sacred text;[3] the concept of shūrā (consultation); and the political crisis during ᶜAli's successorship and the rise of the Khawārij. After ᶜAlī, the differences were mainly about two issues: the Imāmah and the question of 'uṣūl, the "roots." Both issues developed into some of the most significant differences in the history of Islām.

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[1] p. 12.

[2] p. 12.

[3] p. 13.

III

THE SYSTEMATIC SCIENCE OF RELIGIONS AND SECTS

1. The Scientific Basis of Religious Research

a. The Scientific Spirit of Medieval Islām

The Islamic world of the Middle Ages produced some of the most important scientific achievements not only in the history of Islām, but in the history of Western civilization. Modern Western science was originally founded on the Islamic achievements of the medieval period. Their role in the revival of Western science during the Renaissance is acknowledged by many scholars. Arabic as a scientific language used by the various members of the Islamic *'Ummah* played in the Muslim world the role played by Latin in the West. Arabic proved itself capable of providing "scientifically exact expression."[1] This scientific spirit and the existence of a language capable of scientific expression was not limited to the natural sciences, mathematics and logic. It found its way into the human sciences including religious sciences. Al Shahrastānī's intellectual environment was increasingly interested in the usage and application of scientific categories to all disciplines without distinction. A basic belief in the unity of

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[1]Martin Plessner, "The Natural Sciences and Medicine," in *The Legacy of Islām*, ed. Joseph Schacht with C.E. Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1974), p. 427.

knowledge made this possible.

The unity of knowledge necessitated a unity in the method applicable to the study of knowledge. Among the direct consequences of this unity was the emergence of theology as "a scientific discipline, working with rational concepts and using scientific tools, namely, logic and physics."[1] According to Hamilton A.R. Gibb, the "intuitive imagination" which preceded the formulation of orthodox theology "was at least balanced and corrected by a rational understanding of the universe and . . . Islām came to terms with scientific method and modes of thought."[2] In the same intellectual climate, philosophers were sparing no pains to harmonize religion and reason. According to Anawati,

> . . . the quality of wisdom which Muslim philosophy strives to adopt is nonetheless, at least in intention, religious. . . . It contains the religious elements taken from the Koran, but instead of borrowing them as religious elements, it sincerely seeks to "reconcile" religion and reason with the intention of giving the former a scientific "status." It applies to religious principles the structure of Greek philosophy and thereby bestows on the latter a religious resonance which it did not have with the Greek masters. It was thus able to get a hearing from religious minds, or at least those desirous to harmonize their faith with reason and "science." This explains the success of the Metaphysics of Avicenna and of his *De Anima* in the Christian Middle Ages.[3]

Muslim philologists and mathematicians were the first to be attracted by logic and through it they elaborated a number of definite categorical principles that were applied after them to almost all

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[1]Hamilton A.R. Gibb, Studies on the Civilization of Islām, ed. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 202.

[2]Ibid., p. 202.

[3]Anawati, p. 358.

aspects of intellectual life. G.E. Von Grunebaum claims that

> . . . the insertion of logic into several sectors of civilization . . . [reaches] down to the very foundation of Muslim and Christian development. Error and insight, the limits set for speculative thought, the definitions of legal authority and of the scope of the law, its implementation case by case, the attuning of economic practice to the legal norm . . . the ordering of aesthetic experience, the assessing of man's ability to construct a systematic picture of his universe . . . in short, the range of man's horizon and the instrument to bring it under control -- all are directly related to, even dependent on, his acceptance of logic as the determining criterion and tool.[1]

Jurists also developed logical principles and "the task of legal definition and classification absorbed the intellectual energies of the Muslim community to an unparallelled degree."[2] They deserved to be called "the people of logic,"[3] and they left their impact on several intellectual activities in Muslim society. According to Anawati, the place taken by logic in the discussions of the jurists "was to free minds of their fetters and give them the habit of considering problems from all aspects."[4] The final result of such developments was the establishment of a "science of reasoning" which classified the methods used alike by philosopher, jurist and theologian, each in his own way and with modifications to meet the requirements of his science.

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[1]G.E. Von Grunebaum, ed., Logic in Classical Islamic Culture (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970), p. 6.

[2]Gibb, p. 199.

[3]Caesar E. Farah, Islām: Beliefs and Observances (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1968), p. 199.

[4]Anawati, p. 354.

b. Theology and the Science of Religion

Such was the scientific temperament of al Shahrastānī's time, and his work reflected it fully. A theologian by profession, logic and rational reasoning were not new to him. Yet, as a scholar of religion interested in the study of religions and sects, his use of logic and mathematics marks a point of departure from the traditional usages of these disciplines. His statement, "Since I am a jurist and a systematic theologian, someone might think that I am a foreigner in the insights of the methods and laws [of the science of mathematics] and that my pen is alien to its concepts and landmarks,"[1] implies more than just the use of this science as a tool for reasoning in the traditional manner. We can claim that what al Shahrastānī called the "mathematical method" is equivalent to the "scientific method" of modern historians of religions. Since mathematics was taken by most medieval scholars as an objective science with strict scientific results, it is in this sense that we consider al Shahrastānī's usage of such a science a point of departure from its previous usages, and so al Shahrastānī initiates a new era for the scientific study of religion.

Faced with the multiplicity of religions and sects and with the widely divergent aspects of their doctrines and their conflicting natures, al Shahrastānī resorted to a method which provided the scientific apparatus through which an objective understanding of this multiplicity became possible. The first move towards understanding is order and systematization, as in the development of structures and sub-structures

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[1]p. 20.

which not only provide meanings but also establish connections and transform the disordered multiplicity into a religious whole. No other medieval work on religions and sects can compare with Al Milal wa al Nihal of al Shahrastānī, can match its systematic treatment and the rigorous scientific order by which it is distinguished.

We see the modernity of al Shahrastānī and his value for the modern historian of religions in his preoccupation with the development of scientific method and in his concern for structural analysis. Of special significance is al Shahrastānī's reference to theology and the scientific study of religion. The problem, in its modern version, questions whether theologians may call their discipline scientific.

The modern science of religion(s) or "Religionswissenschaft" emerged, above all, as a profound and direct reaction against inadequate theological and philosophical treatment of religion. However, most theologians object strongly to such an attitude, and claim that their discipline is founded on a sound scientific method and that theology is the science of religion par excellence. One of the classic answers to this issue is given by John Baillie who, in his apology for theology, defines it as the only science of religion:

> Systematic Theology, Theology Natural and Revealed, the Philosophy of Religion, the Psychology of Religion, the Science of Religion or of Religions -- these names are in no sense to be taken as representing so many parallel lines of study which can be separately defined and independently pursued. For the most part they represent rather alternative views which have been taken by different groups of students as to the one line of study by which light may properly be thrown upon the problems presented to the scientific mind by the religious phenomenon. . . . This one science of religion we have ourselves

preferred to call by its oldest and simplest name of theology.[1]

Neither historians of religions nor theologians agree on their relationship. Some theologians as well as historians of religions have taken an extreme attitude and understood the relation as one of inclusion, saying that theology includes history of religions or vice versa. Some historians of religions view their discipline as a basis for theology, and consider the study of the origin and development of dogma and its interpretation, constituting the intellectual expression of man's religious experience, as an integral part of their work.

On the other hand, many theologians acknowledge the usefulness of Religionswissenshaft, but regard it as a subsidiary of theology. This opinion is supported by two facts: first that the history of religions is taught in many universities in the faculties of theology, and secondly that many works on the history of religions were until very recently mostly theologically oriented.[2]

Other theologians try to deal with the science of religion by defining its relation to the history of salvation. Still others interpret other religions on the basis of a new conception of "general revelation." Some theologians go even further and consider the possibility of "a theology of religions" which would replace the history of

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[1] John Baillie, The Interpretation of Religion: An Introductory Study of Theological Principles (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 145.

[2] R.J. Zwi Werblowski, "On Studying Comparative Religion: Some Naive Reflections of a Simple-Minded Non-Philosopher," in Religious Studies, Vol. II, No. 2 (June 1975), pp. 152-153.

religions. As Zwi Werblowski indicates, every theology includes within its boundaries a "theology of religions." As he explains, "Theologians must formulate what their respective religions believe not only about God, the soul, salvation, etc., but also about the other religions. They all have, explicitly or implicitly, a 'theology of religions.'"[1] Among those who call for a 'theology of religions,' Heinz Robert Schlette formulates the relation of 'theology of religions' to the science of religion as follows: "The theology of religions is in fact primarily a theme of dogmatic, that is, of theological, speculation and the science of religion forms no more than its occasion, providing the 'facts' and raising quite different questions."[2] The theology of religions shows "to what extent non-Christian religions represent a theme which theology must inquire into and interpret."[3] At the same time, its purpose is to relate "the special sacred history to the general sacred history which runs parallel to it."[4] In other words, it is to link the history of Christianity to the general history of the non-Christian religions on the basis of the idea of salvation. According to Jean Danielou,

> . . . the history of salvation embraces not only the history of mankind, but the whole of cosmic history . . . history falls within Christianity: all secular history is included within sacred history, as a part, a prolegomenon, a preparatory introduction. Profane history covers the whole period

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[1]Werblowsky, p. 152.

[2]Heinz Robert Schlette, Towards a Theology of Religions (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 61.

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

[4]Ibid., p. 118.

> of this world's existence, but Christianity is essentially the next world itself, present here and now in mystery.[1]

In the same tone, Ernst Benz calls for "a new theology of the history of religions."[2] For Benz, "history is in a sense the history of salvation."[3] Accordingly, "the history of religions and the history of the development of the religious consciousness must be seen as coterminous with the history of salvation. If the revelation in Christ is really the fulfillment of time, then it must also be the fulfillment of the history of religions."[4] In another place, Benz calls upon the Christian theologian to "bring history of mankind, soteriology, and history of religions into an inner theological relation."[5] Paul Tillich, also, calls for "a theology of the history of religions."[6]

A modern situation which may represent al Shahrastānī's view is taken by some theologians who reject the division of the study of religion into theological studies and religious studies. They call for the unity of the study of religion, as A.D. Galloway explains:

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[1]Jean Danielou, S.J., The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History (New York: Meridian Books, 1968), p. 24.

[2]Ernst Benz, "On Understanding Non-Christian Religions," in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, ed. M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 5th impression, 1970), p. 131.

[3]Ibid., p. 131.

[4]Ibid., p. 131.

[5]Ernst Benz, "The Theological Meaning of the History of Religions," Journal of Religion, Vol. XLI, No. 1 (January 1961), p. 16.

[6]Paul Tillich, "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian," in The Future of Religions, ed. Jerald Brauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

> The fact that . . . a vastly increased number of widely differing fields of knowledge and special disciplines is now involved in the study of religion and theology raises the question whether this still forms a coherent, unified discipline in itself. Indeed the appearance of the name 'Religious Studies' on the scene as the young but fast-growing little sister of traditional theology and divinity is a sign of this threat of disintegration into a plurality of disciplines.[1]

A recent attempt to achieve this unity has resulted in the establishment of the Institute for Religion and Theology of Great Britain and Ireland, whose objective Galloway defines as follows:

> It is our declared intention in this newly formed Institute to encourage and stimulate the fair, unprejudiced, open-minded, rational study of religion and theology in all its forms and manifestations. Under the heading of religion we study the meaning of its expressions. Under the heading of theology we recognize and assess the truth-claiming element in these expressions. But this does not mean irresponsible religion-tasting.[2]

Al Shahrastānī provides support for this intention by ascribing to the theologian a scientific mentality which enables him to acquire sufficient knowledge to provide a scientific framework for his study of religion. For al Shahrastānī and for most medieval scholars, there is a single methodology applicable to all sciences. The confusion as to whether theology can provide a scientific basis for itself is derived from a narrow understanding of the objectives of theology. This is characteristic of the modern period. Theology as a science in our modern period is declining because of the continuing efforts to limit its scope. Medieval theology was of a completely

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[1]A.D. Galloway, "Theology and Religious Studies -- The Unity of Our Discipline," Religious Studies, Vol. II, No. 2 (Cambridge University Press, June 1975), p. 158.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 162.

different nature from the modernists' understanding of theology as dogma. Norbert Samuelson explains the modern situation of theology in the study of religion as follows:

> The major trend in the academic study of religion is away from creative or original theology in favor of studies in the history of religion. At least one factor in the decline of theology here is an increased concern among young academicians in religion to demonstrate to the university community the legitimacy of religion as a discipline. The problem with 'creative theology' in this connection is that a theologian believes what he says and as such he is suspect of being a secret missionary in academic robes. On the other hand, a historian of religion is not subject to such suspicion.[1]

This direction is considered unfortunate and its rationale is explained in the following: "To teach the history of religion without having theologians would be like teaching the history of philosophy or physics with no philosophers or physicists. But the direction is understandable given the strong anti-religious biases of the American academic community."[2]

Al Shahrastānī's analysis of the situation of theology in his time indicates that theology was a much broader field of research which encompassed many aspects which are no longer understood as theological. A theologian from the medieval period was not only acquainted with the natural or physical sciences but he might have been a practicing scientist or physician. Wisdom included both natural and religious sciences and their methods were alike. The nature of theology in the medieval world is illustrated by Samuelson:

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[1]Norbert Samuelson, "Theology Today -- The Year in Review," Central Conference American Rabbis Journal (October 1971), p. 92.

[2]Ibid., p. 92.

> Some works of medieval Moslem, Jewish and Christian theology are simply instances of theology. But most theological works at this time were not merely metaphysics and few if any presented complete metaphysical systems. Indeed the only period in which most works of theology were complete metaphysical systems was in nineteenth century Germany. Most works of medieval theology dealt with those problems in metaphysics in which there seemed to be a conflict between what the author regarded as the dictates of reason and accepted as the dogmas of his religion, which included more religious topics than questions about God. . . . At this stage of the use of the term problems in at least logic, physics, psychology-astronomy, and ethics were also discussed under the title "theology."[1]

c. The Nature of the Scientific Method and its Implications for the Study of Religions and Sects

The purpose of utilizing a scientific method for the study of religion is to employ its techniques in giving a scientific structure to the vast number of religions and sects. Al Shahrastānī resorts to the scientific method of mathematics to systematize the multiple phenomena of religion, since "the structure of mathematics (mabnā al ḥisāb) is based on the confinement or enclosure (ḥaṣr) and brevity (ikhtiṣār)."[2] He uses the term mabnā, "structure," to refer at once to his structural

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[1]Ibid., p. 90.

[2]p. 20. Some of al Shahrastānī's interpreters missed the real reason for al Shahrastānī's reference to the scientific method provided by mathematics. Carra de Vaux, for example, said: "Dans un autre chapitre de ces Prolégomènes, Shahrastānī parle d'arithmetique et montre des prétentions comme mathématicien; ces prétentions ne sont point justifées par la suite de l'ouvrage." "Al-Shahrastānī," in Encyclopédie de l'Islām, p. 273. Cureton also disregarded al Shahrastānī's mathematical remarks and consider them as designed only "to mark the several divisions and sub-divisions into which [al Shahrastānī] distributed his work" (p. ix). However, these are not simply divisions and sub-divisions of al Shahrastānī's book but rather the foundation of his classification of world religions and sects, philosophies and schools.

analysis of Islamic sects:

> Once the questions which constitute the categories of differentiation are established, the divisions of sects will become clear and the greatest [divisions] will be no more than four after they have been interwoven with each other (tadākhala baᶜduhā fī baᶜd). Thus, the greatest Islamic sects are four: al Qadariyyah, al Sifātiyyah, al Khawārij and al Shīᶜah. These are structured [i.e., they interrelate] with each other (yatarakkab baᶜduhā maᶜa baᶜd) and types [of sects] branch from each sect till they reach seventy-three sects.[1]

Accordingly the purpose of applying scientific structures to the study of religions and sects is explained: "My purpose in composing this book is the confinement (ḥaṣr) of the doctrines (religions and sects) with brevity ('ikhtiṣār)." And since the structure of mathematics is based on confinement and brevity, "I choose the method of completion (ṭarīq al 'istīfā') in arrangement and I set my objectives in accordance with its methods in matters related to classification (taqsīm) and categorization (tabwīb)."[2]

The function of the scientific method provided by mathematics is "history and order" (al Ḥisāb tārīkh wa tawjīh).[3] These two elements of the scientific method, when viewed in their relation to the study of religions and sects, touch two essential cornerstones in this study. First, the scientific study of religions and sects should give paramount consideration to the historical foundations of religious phemonena. Al Shahrastānī developed the concept of the "founder" which provides a historical consciousness in dealing with ideas and doctrines.

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[1] p. 20.

[2] p. 20.

[3] p. 20.

For example, a "category of differentiation" such as "Attributes and Unity" (Sifāt and tawhīd) does not involve history unless the personalities of those who established and adopted it are revealed. This is why the "categories of differentiation" developed by al Shahrastānī are coupled with the "founders" so that the reader will be aware of the doctrines and the historical figures who formulated them. The "categories of differentiation" as structural patterns were made historically intelligible through the category of "founders" ('ashāb).

Tawjīh, the other function of the scientific method, signifies discipline and orientation. Its purpose is to direct the work of the historian of religions with principles which mark his field of study as a distinct discipline. The significance of this can be seen in the methodological import it ascribes to history as a principle unifying separate events. A scientific method is history and order insofar as it organizes and connects individual elements into a recognizable structure. This aspect of history, based on mathematical understanding, has been discussed in the modern period by Levi-Strauss, who thinks of history in the same methodological terms as al Shahrastānī. According to Levi-Strauss,

> . . . history is tied neither to man nor to any particular object. It consists wholly in its method, which experience proves to be indispensible for cataloguing the elements of any structure whatever, human or non-human, in their entirety. It is therefore far from being the case that the search for intelligibility comes to an end in history as though this were its terminus. Rather, it is history that serves as the point of departure in any quest for intelligibility.[1]

In another place, he states:

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[1]Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 6th impression, 1973), p. 258.

> The concern for continuity . . . is indeed a manifestation . . . of knowledge which is interstitial and unifying rather than discontinuous and analogical; instead of multiplying objects by schemes promoted to the role of additional objects, it seems to transcend an original discontinuity by relating objects to one another. But it is this reason, wholly concerned with closing gaps and dissolving differences, which can properly be called analytical. . . . History does not therefore escape the common obligation of all knowledge, to employ a code to analyze its object, even (and especially) if a continuous reality is attributed to that object . . . the code consists in a chronology. There is no history without dates.[1]

Al Shahrastānī's analysis shows that the purpose of the scientific method is to establish a set of relations between religions and sects in order to present them as a continuous historical entity. History and order bind the disconnected elements so that they appear as a total, intelligible and coherent structure.

Another significant issue raised by al Shahrastānī is the necessity to harmonize between what he calls <u>al ṣināᶜah al ḥisābiyyah</u> (the scientific profession), and <u>al ṣināᶜah al kitābiyyah</u> (the art of writing).[2] The implications of such a harmony are very significant for al Shahrastānī's method and also for the modern aspects of the scientific method. We might explain them in terms of a harmony between what we call now the "form" and the "content." Al Shahrastānī's objective in the use of the scientific method is wholly methodological. It is concerned only with the structure of religions and sects, their form and not their content. However, al Shahrastānī as a writer expresses his concern for the content and the manner of its presentation.

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[1] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 262, 283.

[2] p. 24.

Although he may suggest that the scientific method and the literary method have different techniques, a concern for the unity of form and content can easily be deduced from his work. Religious knowledge must first be structured according to a certain order and then presented in a readable manner, in a style not affected by the harshness of the scientific method.

The harmonizing process is al Shahrastānī's attempt to do justice both to the data which constitute the content of religion and to the scientific framework within which the data are given structure. The art of writing demands certain procedures and the systematic writer is one who can avoid damaging the artistic qualities of the subject of religion. A successful work on the history of religions has to consider these significant factors. It is as necessary to provide works whose data are carefully systematized as it is necessary to use a style of writing which fits the lofty nature of the religious data. The lack of this condition may explain why some of the modern works on the history of religions are difficult to read despite their perfection in matters of classification and structure. The difficulty appears to proceed from the failure to balance form and content or, in al Shahrastānī's terms, the failure to "take care of the conditions of the two arts."[1]

2. The Problem of Classification

The purpose of classification is order. The reader of al

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[1]p. 24.

Shahrastānī's work will easily notice that one of its main features is a profound concern for matters of classification. This systematic device distinguishes his work from the bulk of medieval studies on the same subject, studies which he severely criticized precisely because they lacked a system which renders the religions and sects intelligible. Al Shahrastānī does not mention these works by title. However, they can be known from the literature on the sects and heresies.[1] His criticism emphasizes the inadequacy and confusion with which these works treated their subject. They were not clear how to distinguish between a religion, a sect, and a school of philosophy; nor how to define the three categories; nor how to compare the influence of each on the other. Most of these works are collections of historical and contemporary data without the analytic, systematic and comparative elements which might have added profundity to the effort already put into them. Al Shahrastānī sees his contribution to the discipline, which is by no means a

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[1]Georges C. Anawati distinguishes critically two groups of works on the sects in the following manner: "Heresiology has to classify the doctrines which it has collected. It can do so in a material way, even according to the order of appearance of the heresies, but it must also try to reduce them to a certain number of types. It is therefore interesting to find out the method of classification. If the Ibāna and the Maqālāt of al Ashᶜarī and the Farq Bayn al Firaq of al Baghdādī (d. 1037) are somewhat elusive on this particular point, the works of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1065) and of al Shahrastānī (d. 1153), do not fail to present a new viewpoint on the grouping of beliefs and by this shed much light on our own subject." Of al Shahrastānī's work, Anawati states: "In the Milal wa'l-Nihal of al Shahrastānī we have the most important work on Muslim heresiology. In contrast to Ibn Ḥazm, the author does not aim at refuting errors, but merely strives to state the doctrines as objectively as possible. The tone remains calm and sedate; it is a relaxation to read it after the tumultuous diatribes of the fiery Andalusian." Georges C. Anawati, "Philosophy, Theology, and Mysticism," in The Legacy of Islam, ed. Joseph Schacht with C.E. Bosworth, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 361-362.

new field of study, as mainly methodological in character, dealing primarily with the development of categories of classification and the introduction of a rigorous academic method for the understanding of religions, sects and philosophical schools.

a. General Classification of the Peoples of the World

Before developing his classification of world religions and sects, al Shahrastānī felt it necessary to introduce a new approach to the classifications by which the peoples of the world are distinguished (see diagram, p.300). This serves as a general orientation to the subject of classification. Al Shahrastānī found several different ways currently available for classifying the peoples of the world. "Some scholars," he observed, "classified the peoples of the world in accordance with the seven regions";[1] the people of each of these regions share "different characteristics and natures indicated by different colors and languages."[2] A second classification followed "the four directions, namely, the East, the West, the North and the South,"[3] and assigned particular characteristics and laws to each direction. A third classification identified the people of the world according to the great nations, "the Arabs, the ᶜAjam [Persians], the

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[1]Al Shahrastānī does not name these seven regions. Fred Louis Parrish defines a 'regional' religion as "that of a particular people in a particular area, in which a characteristic interpretive body of concepts function or prevail." See The Classification of Religions: Its Relation to the History of Religions (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1941), p. 128.

[2]p. 2.

[3]p. 2.

Romans and the Indians."[1] The final classification given by al Shahrastānī, and the one which he adopts in his study, is that which classifies the peoples of the world according to their beliefs, whether religious or philosophical. He says, "there are, also, those who classify [peoples] according to opinions and doctrines, and this is our objective in the composition of this book."[2] This group is clearly divided into "the people of religions and sects" and "the people of opinions." Al Shahrastānī includes in the first group the Magians, the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims.[3] In the second group he places "the materialist philosophers, the Ṣabeans, the star- and idol-worshippers and the Brahmans." The second group is further divided into innumerable sub-groups, while the number of divisions in the first group is known definitely.[4]

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[1]p. 2. I.R. al Fārūqī has translated this as follows: "Scholars divided mankind in many ways to suit their purposes. Some divided men according to religions and climates. . . . Others, according to the continents they inhabit. . . . Others according to the civilization to which they belong." The Great Asian Religions, p. 326.

[2]p. 2.

[3]p. 2.

[4]p. 2. Al Fārūqī's rendering of this last classification runs as follows: "Others divide men according to their religious views and that is what this book proposes to do. Primarily, men fall into two main groups: Religions and sects, such as the Majūs (Manichaeans, Zoroastrians, etc.), Jews, Christians and Muslims; and philosophies and schools, such as the philosophers, the materialists. . . . Every group is subdivided into many subgroups. Unlike the philosophies and schools which are so varied that it is impossible to systematize them comprehensively, the religions and sects are so amenable because their tenets derive from given scriptures and traditions. However wide or narrow the differences that separate them, it is known that the Majūs divide into seventy sects, the Jews into seventy-one, the Christians into seventy-two and the Muslims into seventy-three." The Great Asian Religions, p. 326.

From the four ways of classifying the peoples of the world, al Shahrastānī adopted the one which fits the nature of his work. He excluded classifications according to geographical location or nationality; these serve a different, and limited, purpose from his own. Moreover, they reduce the status of religion and see it as one aspect of the different manifestations of the environment or the culture. Religions, here, are included as one aspect of man's life seen in its regional (environmental), geographical, racial or cultural dimensions. This reminds us of some trends in the modern study of religion which consider religion as a social or a cultural system, a psychic phenomenon or even as a literary form. Al Shahrastānī's adoption of the fourth classification was meant to avoid reducing religion to any of these elements. He acknowledges religion as a sui generis phenomenon which is to be understood in its totality, and not as expressing an aspect within a larger scheme of thought. Eliade has expressed the same line of thought in his call to take religion and religious phenomena at their own level, as "something religious." According to Eliade, "to try to grasp the essence of such phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it -- the element of the sacred."[1] Like al Shahrastānī, Eliade thinks that the religious phenomenon can be seen as a part of a culture, environment, civilization, society, language, or economic theory. But both believe that to explain religion in terms of any one of these concepts is to

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[1]Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, tr. Rosemary Sheed (New York: World Publications, 8th printing, 1972), p. xiii.

miss its essence. Eliade expresses this attitude in an ironical way by saying: "It would be as futile as thinking you could explain Madame Bovary by a list of social, economic and political facts; however true, they do not affect it as a work of literature."[1] Both men do not deny the usefulness of these explanations but they insist that religion should be considered first of all in itself. For al Shahrastānī, religion in itself consists of ideas, concepts and doctrines, and it must be treated as such. He is aware, too, that ideas and doctrines are not only religion but also philosophy. Thus, his second task is to show systematically the nature of both and the characteristics of religious thinking and philosophical thinking. His third task is to distinguish the religious from the philosophical. This is briefly the reason for reporting his three classifications in the logical manner we described above.

This kind of reductionism in classification has been studied by F.L. Parrish who presents a digest of classifications "which accord with aspects of the religion's environment."[2] According to him, "the group of classifiers which follows include those who seek order among the religions through the use of the criteria of language, race, geography, and culture -- either singly or in combination."[3] These match exactly the group of classifiers which al Shahraṣtānī mentioned in the introduction to his work. Characteristically, al Shahrastānī does not

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[1]Eliade, p. xiii.

[2]Parrish, p. 35.

[3]Ibid., p. 35.

name those whom he criticizes. But the groups which match them in the modern period are mentioned by Parrish and according to his arrangement they may be summed up as follows:

I. Language: The criterion of language was adopted by Max Müller. In his Introduction to the Science of Religion, he stated: "the only scientific and truly genetic classification of religions is the same as the classifications of language."[1] Accordingly, Müller distinguished three groups of religions: Indo-European, Semitic, and Turanian.[2]

II. Race; Ethnology: This was adopted by Whitney, who distinguished between "race religion" (a religion of the group) and "religions of individual founders."[3] J.F. Clarke also distinguished between: 1-One race or "ethnic religions": Brahmanism, Buddhism, Religion of Egypt, Greece. . . . 2-"Transcending one race," or "Catholic religions": Judaism, Mohammedanism (local form), Christianity (universal form).[4] Chantepie de la Saussaye emphasized the "Ethnographical and historical cohesion of the peoples of the earth."[5] His classification included religion of primitive or nature people, of the Chinese, of the Japanese, of the Egyptians, of the Semitic people. . . . D.J.H. Ward followed Max Müller's

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[1]Quoted by Parrish, p. 35.

[2]Parrish, p. 35.

[3]Ibid., p. 35.

[4]Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[5]Ibid., p. 35.

linguistic classification interpreted by Ward as reflecting racial relationship. Ward's classification focused on ethnological relationships and historical connections. Thus we have the Oceanic religions, the African, the American, the Mongolian and the Mediterranean races.[1]

III. Geography: R.E. Hume classified religions according to regions of origin. Accordingly, we have religions originating in South Asia . . . in East Asia . . . in West Asia.[2] Oscar Peschel, Ellsworth Huntington, Vidal de la Blanche classified religions on the basis of climate conditions and physical environments.

IV. Language-Race-Geography: Conrad von Orelli arranged religions into seven groups: Turanian group -- Hamitic family -- Semitic family -- Indo-European family -- African group -- American group -- Oceanic group.[3]

V. Culture: F.B. Jevons divided religions into "customary" religions and "positive" religions. Accordingly we have: Religions of "savage" culture -- of "primitive" culture -- of "advanced" culture -- religion "co-extensive with life."[4] Maurice Vernes distinguished two classifications: 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' religions giving importance to "the demands of geography and the developments of history."[5] G.F. Moore also distinguished between

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[1]Parrish, p. 36.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 38.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 39.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 40.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

"civilized" and "uncivilized" as representing two stages of culture.[1]

b. A Philosophico-Religious Classification

After considering the classification of the peoples of the world, al Shahrastānī proceeds to a more specific classification which concentrates on the philosophical and religious beliefs of mankind. This is a continuation or rather an elaboration of the fourth of the general classifications of the peoples of the world. (See diagram, p. 300) Al Shahrastānī tries to show the gradual development of belief from mere philosophical speculation to an established system of doctrines. He distinguishes the stages in the development of religion as follows:

1. The Sophists: rejection of both the sensuous and the rational.
2. The Naturalists: acceptance of the sensuous, rejection of the rational.
3. The Materialists: acceptance of both the sensuous and the rational; rejection of regulations and laws.
4. The Ṣabeans: acceptance of the sensuous and the rational, acceptance of regulations and laws; rejection of sharīᶜah (as a body of laws) and submission.
5. The Jews and Christians: acceptance of the sensuous and the rational; acceptance of regulations of laws; acceptance of a body of laws and a kind of submission; rejection of the sharīᶜah of the prophet

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[1]Parrish, p. 41.

Muḥammad.

6. The Muslims: acceptance of all the above mentioned.[1]

In this evolution of religious thought, the first stages are purely philosophical. There are no laws, and hence no submission or obedience, because these philosophies have no social function. The doctrines created are based on individual efforts and do not derive from any external influence. The establishment of regulations and laws designates a second stage in this evolution. However, the religious quality is not fully present because the laws are not binding; the philosophical orientation still dominates the religious.

The establishment of a sharīᶜah which requires the full submission and obedience of the individual constitutes a third stage in the development.[2] This stage distinguishes Judaism, Christianity and Islām from the rest.

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[1]p. 202.

[2]Sharīᶜah is in this sense the embodiment of religion, a contrast to the free system of philosophy. According to Wach's analysis, sharīᶜah can be viewed as religion in action. Being involved in action through sharīᶜah distinguishes religion from philosophy. Wach defines sharīᶜah and other similar phenomena in world religions as "an intricate system of Casuistry" which has evolved and in which "the right way of acting or serving is defined for every conceivable situation." Joachim Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions, pp. 116-117. In another place, Wach explains that the concept sharīᶜah includes two groups of rules: "regulations of worship and ritual duties and regulations of judicial and political nature. The fundamental tendency of the sharīᶜah was the religious evaluation of all the affairs of life." See his Sociology of Religion, p. 295. In al Shahrastānī's classification, the term sharīᶜah is used for religions other than Islām to indicate the embodiment of religious laws into a system practiced by the individual and his community. To use Wach's terminology, it is the expression of religion and religious experience in action.

It is also relevant to mention that this evolution is a positive development. In each stage, we have an acceptance of something which was rejected in the previous stage. Thus, this evolution gradually progresses from denial to affirmation. In religious terms, this can be viewed as a movement from disobedience to obedience, the full essence of religiosity.

This classification also suggests the interaction in the development of human thought between philosophy and religion. According to the arrangement of this classification, religion seems to be rooted in philosophy. It departs from it only when it acquires for itself a specific function in man's life. In this compound classification of philosophy and religion, there is a stage in the development where the two disciplines merge. However, this merging does not seem to be for the benefit of either. The Ṣabeans, for al Shahrastānī, are located at the center of the development of philosophy and religion. They are actually the line of demarcation between the two disciplines. For him, they are included under the philosophies even though they have developed regulations and laws. These laws do not allow them to be classified among the religions because they do not constitute a sharī^{c}ah. However, al Shahrastānī does not altogether separate philosophy from religion. His dialogue between the Ḥanīfs and the Ṣabeans, and the skillful use of philosophical arguments by the Ḥanīfs on different issues (especially the issue of knowledge), suggests that he sees a fruitful relation between the two disciplines, especially in the speculative aspects of religion. In this relation, however, the religious factor is preserved because it goes beyond the philosophical stage to stand by itself as a

sui generis category in the third classification.

c. Classification of World Religions on the Basis of Revelation: The "Book" as a Category of Classification

In this gradual manner al Shahrastānī reaches his final classification of religions as entities separate from philosophies (diagram, p.300). Revelation serves as the criterion according to which the different religions of the world may be validly classified. The final stage in the classification of the peoples of the world becomes the initial stage in the classification of religions. Judaism, Christianity and Islām, the religions which accept the sensuous and the rational, and which possess a body of laws constituting a sharīᶜah, are now classified as religions based upon a revelation embodied in a sacred text (for al Shahrastānī, a "Book").[1] This group is followed by another which al Shahrastānī designates as "those which have a pseudo-book (shibh kitāb)."[2] He places the Magians and Manichaeans into this category. A third group possesses regulations and laws without depending on a book. The Ṣabeans are the example of this type. Finally comes the group which has no books, no regulations, no laws or legislations. Those are the philosophers, the materialists, the star- and idol-worshippers, and the Brahmans.

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[1]p. 24.

[2]Al Shahrastānī says that such texts were revealed to Abraham and then taken away, "raised to heaven," "because of certain actions that were committed by the Magians" (p. 161). A French translation of this category runs, "La deuxième (catégorie) s'appliqe aux religions ayant un 'prétendu' Livre révélé." See Dominique Sourdel, "La Classification des Sectes Islamiques Dans le Kitāb Al-MilAl D'Al-Shahrastānī," Studia Islamica, Vol. XXXI (1970), p. 240.

This classification can be systematically arranged as follows:

1. A "Book" - Jews, Christians and Muslims
2. A "pseudo-book" - the Magians and the Manichaeans
3. Laws and regulations without a "Book" - the Ṣabeans
4. No "Book," no laws or legislative principles - the philosophers, the materialists, star- and idol-worshippers and the Brahmans.

The first category is originally Qur'ānic, used to distinguish Jews and Christians as "People of the Book." It initiated the usage of the concept of revelation based on a Book as a criterion of differentiation through which the religions of the world are to be classified. The focus here is on the function of revelation in formulating laws and injunctions which maintain order and organization in society. It is the sharī^c^ah, the functional aspect of revelation, that counts for al Shahrastānī in his understanding of the nature and function of religion, and also in the classification of religions. We see this more clearly in the third type of religions, which has no Books but still has laws and injunctions and thus is differentiated from the fourth type which lacks both. However, the laws of the third type are not sanctioned by revelation and are therefore not to be considered as a sharī^c^ah.

In the modern study of religions, the concept of revelation has been used widely, especially by theologically oriented historians of religions, to classify world religions. Among its most important advocates are Hendrik Kraemer, Nathan Söderblom, Jean Danielou, John Baillie and Joachim Wach. None of them, however, has made an objective use of the concept as a category of classification structured on the

basis of its function. They have rather insisted on revelation as a matter of contrast between Christianity and the rest of the religions of the world, even those among them which possess revelation. What differentiates them from al Shahrastānī in the use of this category is the latter's emphasis on the social function of revelation, in the establishment of sharīᶜahs as distinctive ways of living by which traditions of the world are distinguished. His realistic position encouraged him to widen the concept to initiate new categories for historical groups that were known for possessing laws which were not based on direct revelation.

Bruce B. Lawrence maintains that the third category implies a distinction to be considered as "a religious typology applicable to several historical groups."[1] "Ṣabeanism" thus is given a methodological function as a category by which these historical groups of religions are to be known. According to Lawrence, al Shahrastānī is the first Muslim theologian "to describe the Hindus as Ṣābians."[2] According to him, "Shahrastānī not only approaches Indian religion sympathetically; he also employs a unique analytical model (Ṣābianism) to portray Indian idol worship."[3] Noticing al Shahrastānī's emphasis on laws and regulations and their role in religion, Lawrence argues that al Shahrastānī applies the category of Aṣḥāb al rūḥāniyyāt (Proponents of Spiritual Beings) which is the "highest theological ranking" to those Vaiṣṇavas

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[1] Bruce B. Lawrence, "Shahrastānī on Indian Idol Worship," Studia Islamica, Vol. XXXVIII (1973), pp. 65, 69, 71.

[2] Ibid., p. 65.

[3] Ibid., p. 71.

and Saivas "who adhere to moral principles and law-giving structures derived from a spiritual intermediary (malak ruḥānī)."[1] This is done in order to distinguish them from two other groups, star-worshippers and Idolaters, who constitute al Shahrastānī's fourth category of world religions. Viṣṇu and Siva as the "principal rūḥānīyyāt" are considered to be prophets. This position is based on al Shahrastānī's statement: "And from among the people of India, [there is] a group which accepted spiritual intermediaries who came to them from God, blessed and glorified, in the form of human beings, but without a Book, commanding them to perform certain actions and abstain from others, establishing laws and clarifying for them the injunctions."[2]

d. General Remarks on the Internal Logical Structure of the Three Classifications

By studying man through his beliefs, al Shahrastānī implies that to know man is to know what he thinks. The study of man through his thought is preferred to other approaches because it is both comprehensive and universal. It gives significant attention to theories of knowledge, attitudes towards the world (its reality or otherwise), and the actual manifestation of such ideas in man's life and relations to others. It sees in philosophy the beginning of man's reflection on his existence. His attitude towards the self and the world develops gradually from absolute rejection of both to full acceptance. During this process, man feels the need to provide a firm basis for his

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[1]pp. 180, 444, 450.

[2]p. 450.

relation to the world by establishing the laws which govern and maintain its existence. When these laws are man-made, the positive quality is not yet complete. This happens only when laws are acknowledged as the expression of a system which gives them sanction and power. This system must be founded on divine revelation, otherwise its sanction through man's obedience will never be complete. According to al Shahrastānī, this is how religions take shape and become distinct from other doctrines and opinions.

The three classifications which we have analyzed represent a coherent structure when viewed as a whole (diagram, p. 300). The systematic attempt at classification proceeds gradually from the most general to the most specific. Each classification takes its starting point from the end of the preceding classification. In the general classification of the peoples of the world, it is shown that the study of mankind can be approached from different points of view. Al Shahrastānī takes out the approach which analyzes the opinions and attitudes, philosophical or religious, of mankind, and considers it the most proper approach for the study of man. Then he takes up this final classification of the peoples of the world and discusses the philosophical and religious content of the beliefs of mankind, arranging them into an evolutionary process. He begins with philosophies which reject the world; this negative attitude gradually disappears until we reach an absolutely positive state, the most complete structure of religion, a <u>sharīᶜah</u>.

The second classification is connected to the third through the use of revelation as a criterion for classifying different groups of

religions. The last category of the second classification is the first category in the third classification. Indeed, the third classification inverts the second, where the second classification proceeds from philosophy to religion; the third takes us from religion back to philosophy. In terms of revelation, the philosophies occupy the lowest rung of the ladder. In terms of the evolution of thought, they come at the beginning.

In the modern study of religion, no serious attempt (with the exception of Parrish's work) has been made to treat comprehensively the question of classification. This problem is one of the most neglected issues in the modern contribution of the history of religions. Heinrich Frick describes this situation as follows: "There is as yet no generally accepted division of religions according to their essence and stage of development."[1] He further states that there is a "critical lack of a generally accepted typology."[2] He explains the reason for this lack: "As long as people still held their own religion to be the only true one, or indeed as long as all positive religions were considered to be inferior to the simple religion of reason, a systematic division of the history of religions was not necessary. It was not until an abundance of historical religions came within our scope during the nineteenth century, that the need for a standard system grew into

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[1]Heinrich Frick, "The Aim of the Comparative Study of Religions (Typology)" from Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft, tr. in Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 480.

[2]Ibid., p. 481.

an imperative demand."[1]

Most of the accepted classifications of world religions are based on those provided by 19th century thinkers. Baillie is critical of the 19th century classifications because of their tendency "to regard human religion as broken up into a large number of separate 'religions' which bore no relation to one another, so that the task of science was simply one of arranging or grouping them in separate pigeonholes, as we might group discrete objects like flint arrowheads or postage stamps."[2] Baillie suggests that serious interest in the matter of classification means after all that there is a profound relation between different systems of religious traditions and that they ought to be classified accordingly. Nineteenth century scholars saw that relation as representing merely "different levels of development," the result of which is that "the older problem of classifying . . . has been in large measure displaced by the newer one of tracing the main line of development which advancing religion seems typically to follow. The old vertical lines which were used for the division and subdivision of world-religion, have in instance for instance, been replaced by horizontal ones."[3] Despite his criticism of this developmental manner of classification, Baillie's philosophy of the nature of religious progress is a similar concept. He stresses "successive stages

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[1]Frick, p. 481.

[2]John Baillie, The Interpretation of Religion: An Introductory Study of Theological Principles (New York: Abingdon Press, 1928, 1956), p. 414.

[3]Ibid., p. 415.

in the development of the conception of God" which, he holds, reaches its culmination in "the Cross of Christ."[1] Religions, he suggests, can be classified in accordance with the stages of this development in the idea of God. Frick is also critical of the nineteenth century classifications. They are not, for him, "a lasting typology."[2] They are

> . . . vistas hacked through the jungle of the history of religions, but are not practicable ways which lead to a good. Each and every one of them suffers from a basic fault, based as they are on a moment which does not necessarily belong to the religious act, but which stems from a connection of the religious act with something else. . . . Typology cannot be developed from connections which are still doubtful, or from the groping for outlines, but it has to be developed from the religious act itself.[3]

There are many other classifications which have expressed different emphases and were made to suit different purposes. Robert E. Hume gave a brief account of these, which he arranged as follows:

1. Classification of religions as "dead or living"
2. Classification of religions "according to their geographical origin"
3. Chronological classifications "according to the founder's birthdate"
4. Numerical classifications according to "the number of each religion's adherents"
5. Classification of religions "according to their scope": particularism vs. Universalism
6. Classification in accordance with "the conception of deity": theism,

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[1]Baillie, p. 446.

[2]Frick, p. 481.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 481.

no deity and polytheism

7. Classification according to "the number of deities recognized at present"

8. Classification according to the personality of the founder (with the special exception of Islām).[1]

These eight classifications are called by Hume "matter-of-fact classifications." However, he identifies another group of classifications as "unscientific."[2] These include classifications into true and false religions, or natural and revealed religions; classifications in accordance with "personal choice"; and classifications based on "value and outlook."[3]

Hume (agreeing with al Shahrastānī) has suggested that Sacred Scriptures should be used as a special apparatus for studying religions. The study of the Sacred Scriptures of various organized religions is considered by him "the most important advance in the understanding of religions in recent years."[4] They furnish the student with an "authoritative norm"[5] and "with the only uniform basis for reporting the various religions."[6] According to Hume, "the best possible classification of religions is according to the extent of the opportunity and

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[1]Robert E. Hume, The World's Living Religions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 12-17.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 12.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 17.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 10.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 10.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 10.

responsibility which each provides for the individual, and also for human society at large."[1] According to his analysis, each of the religions of the world "does make an estimate of the worth of the individual, and also of the worth of society."[2] Here we see a point of comparison between al Shahrastānī and Hume. Both favor classifying religions according to their function: the role they play in maintaining social order and in defining the individual's relation to his community. While favoring the same principle, the two men arrange their classifications differently. Al Shahrastānī proceeds from religions which focus attention on the individual to those which focus on society. Nevertheless, he considers that system the best which can preserve the individual's freedom and rights and supplement them with the benefits derived from cooperation with his community. Tamānu^c and ta^cāwun are the best procedures for communication between the individual and the group.[3] The group of religions which possesses these qualities includes Judaism, Christianity and Islām because they have established a manhaj or a sharī^cah which regulates the relation between the individual and the group. Hume, on the other hand, classifies most non-Christian religions as concerned chiefly with the salvation of the individual. He sees Christianity as "the only religion which seeks a salvation, both individual and social, by means of cooperative service."[4]

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[1] Hume, p. 17.

[2] Ibid., p. 17.

[3] pp. 25-26.

[4] Hume, p. 17.

And while Hume makes an exception for Islām, he nevertheless thinks that Islām's social interest is for "social domination, not for the sake of a comprehensive social betterment through cooperative service."[1] Al Shahrastānī avoided such value-judgments; he did not state which of the three religions is most responsive to the needs of the individual and society. The only distinction he made was a matter of fact: his statement that Judaism has a distinct sharīᶜah, while Christianity did not develop laws or injunctions of its own but derived them from Judaism.[2]

Al Shahrastānī clearly saw that to classify religions with tools alien to their essence is to miss the mark. His classification of world religions took the religious factor as its primary criterion. His "categories of differentiation" stem from the religions themselves and are based upon the specific qualities of the religions under investigation. Parrish in his study of the problems of classification has stressed that

> . . . religions cannot be scientifically classified according to some pre-ordained framework of ideas. They must depend upon their own interpretations of religious experience if they are to find their rightful place in classification. Historical religions, as bodies of knowledge of the religious factor, vary only in accordance with their own conceptual natures . . . in the criterion of the interpretation of the religious factors as a whole we believe that we have found that which is able to handle religions as wholes, and not violate their integrity. . . . The genetic classification, unlike all other classifications, is not artificial but natural: it is built up from the 'elements of order' found within the religions themselves; and

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[1]Hume, p. 17.

[2]p. 162.

> it is fitted together by the historian who surveys the field entire.[1]

Parrish, then, directs his criticism at all classifications which do not proceed genetically and which are not based on the religious factor.[2] His criticism covers all geographical, regional, cultural, societal, social, or linguistic patterns of classification. Al Shahrastānī's "categories of differentiation" do justice to what Parrish calls the "religious factor" in classification; they are "genetic" and natural, being derived from the concepts taught by the religions. Al Shahrastānī's classification is a religious classification, based on the content of religions themselves. It is also functional, being founded on the role played by religions in social organization.

3. The Foundation for a Universal Classification of Sects: The Structural Study of Sects

Around each religion emerges a number of sects with similar beliefs but a different point of view. The number of these sects would be incalculable if they were not arranged according to specific types, and al Shahrastānī found all earlier attempts at classifying sects to be inadequate and confusing, even in method: "I did not find two works among them that agree on one method in the classification of sects."[3] The writers had different methods of classification "which are not founded upon a law based on a text or even on a rule which tells about

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[1]Parrish, p. 134.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 136.

[3]P. 3.

A. General Classifications of the People of the World

1- Regional (Environment & Climate)
2- Geographical
3- Civilizational
4- Doctrinal:
   1-philosophical
   2-religious

B. A Philosophical-Religious Classification

1- Rejection of the Sensuous and the Rational
2- Acceptance of the Sensuous; Rejection of the Rational
3- Acceptance of the Sensuous and the Rational; Rejection of Laws
4- Acceptance of the Sensuous and the Rational; Acceptance of Laws; Rejection of Sharī^{c}ah
5- Acceptance of the Sensuous and the Rational; Acceptance of Laws; Acceptance of Sharī^{c}ah

C. A Classification of World Religions: The Category of the Book

1- Religions of the Book: Judaism-Christianity-Islām
2- Religions based on a pseudo-book: Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism . . .
3- Religions without a Book but with Laws and Regulations: Mandean Religion (Ṣabeans)
4- Religions without a Book and without Laws and Regulations: Philosophers, Materialists, Star- and Idol-Worshippers and Brahmanism

[their] appearance (existence)."[1] Because of this fundamental inadequacy, al Shahrastānī undertook the task of establishing rules for classifying the sects. The importance of the problem compelled him to mention it among the five introductions, in which he concentrated on methodological problems before describing world religions and sects.

a. The Structural Study of Islamic Sects

To al Shahrastānī, sects consist of doctrines and founders. The structural study of sects requires attention to both dimensions. For the doctrines, they must be reduced through cross-analysis to a minimum number by classifying them into 'uṣūl and furūᶜ, that is, "roots" and "branches." Al Shahrastānī developed what he called qawāᶜid al Khilāf (categories of differentiation). Sects could be classified by means of these categories: "If the [basic doctrinal] problems, which are the categories of differentiation, are established, the classification of sects will become clear."[2] The analysis of each sect must, then, start with the belief of the founder and with special consideration given to the "category of differentiation" by which he is best characterized. The founders, then, represent 'uṣūl. After the founder, the sub-sects derived from his sect may be analyzed in accordance with the "category of differentiation" by which they are best characterized. These are the furūᶜ.

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[1]p. 3.

[2]p. 5.

The purpose of classification is order. It is a purely systematic task in which not only are the sects themselves to be analyzed, but also their origins and historical context. The divisions and subdivisions will show historical relationships and make the sects appear not as separate unconnected phenomena. To build up a structure of relationships between phenomena requires an initial negation of their independence. There must also be a proper distinction between structures and sub-structures; the latter are derivative from the former and must not be confused with them. When we apply this two-fold principle to the phenomenon of the sects, we will realize that not every doctrinal opinion (maqālah) constitutes an independent structure. Thus, the first step is to build major structures in the form of major doctrinal opinions (maqālāt) complete in themselves; what remain are derivatives, sub-structures, from these major structures. This procedure is suggested in al Shahrastānī's statement: "It is known beyond doubt that not everyone who holds a particular opinion on some problem is to be counted as a founder of a belief."[1]

This limitation controls the number of doctrinal opinions (maqālāt), or structures, in the classification. "There must be a controlling principle (ḍābiṭ) for differentiating between problems which are 'uṣūl (roots). Categories must be established on the basis that each category and its founder represent an independent belief."[2] The ḍābiṭ is the line of demarcation between structures, and the factor

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[1]p. 3.

[2]p. 3.

which gives these structures their independence if they are to be treated on an individual basis, in isolation from other structures.

According to our understanding of al Shahrastānī's scheme, there are two ways in which the structure and sub-structures can be explicated. First, the sect as established by the founder constitutes a structure by itself. Sub-structures develop from the various doctrines which other founders -- "sub-founders" -- build on the original founder's teachings. Secondly, in case a sect was developed from a sub-sect, the sub-sect will constitute a structure by itself, and the sect developed from it will constitute a sub-sect; this, however, involves seeing these later sects independently from the original founder's sect. Logically, then, we find a third element if we consider these later sects in relation to the original sect. In this case we will have: sect, sub-sect, and sub-sub-sect, etc. In this manner, a whole-structure of sects may be developed. Al Shahrastānī illustrates this whole-structure in the following statement:

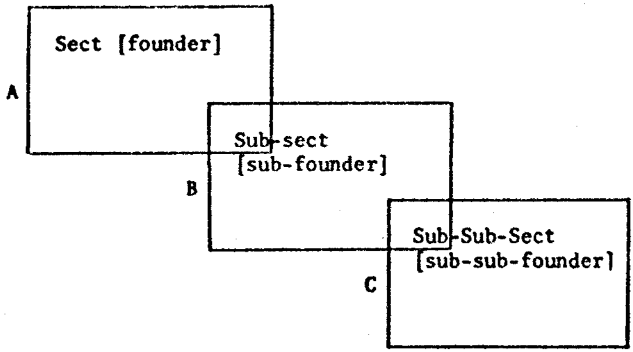
> If we find that one of the leaders of the 'Ummah has distinguished himself by one maqālah [which we classify as categories of differentiation], we will classify his maqālah as a doctrine, and his group [of followers] as a sect. And if we find that one [leader] has taken a particular stand on one problem, we will not consider his maqālah as a doctrine or his group a sect. Rather, we will include [his sect] under [the original founder] of his maqālah, and we will restore [return] the rest of his maqālah to the branches which are not classified as distinct doctrines. [In this way] the categories will [be finite in number].[1]

Accordingly, the main sects will be limited in number, after they have been interrelated with and "included within each other (tadākhala

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[1] pp. 4-5.

ba^c^duhā fi ba^c^d)."[1] (See diagram)



A in relation to B is a sect (founder)
B in relation to A is a sub-sect (sub-founder)
B in relation to C is a sect (founder)
C in relation to B is a sub-sect (sub-founder)
C in relation to A is a sub-sub-sect (sub-sub-founder)

It is the dābit which distinguishes al Shahrastānī's work on the sects from other works on the subject. He explains this difference clearly in his criticism of these works: "I found that none of the writers had taken care to establish this dābit. Instead, they continued to record the doctrines of the 'Ummah in the accepted traditional manner, [not on the basis of] a permanent law or a constant principle."[2] The interrelationships between the structures and sub-structures reveal new meanings not only for the phenomenon of sects in general, but also for the understanding of the individual sects. The sect cannot be understood in its totality unless the relations between its elements are defined; the meaning of the phenomenon and the individual elements that

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[1]p. 5.

[2]pp. 3-4.

constitute it cannot be found through the earlier writers' method of studying the sects as isolated entities.

The phenomenon of sects is especially important because of its effect on the understanding of the tradition from which these sects were derived. Because of its system of classification, al Shahrastānī's work provides a systematic understanding of Islām as a religion, for the classification clarifies the differences between the orthodox tradition and the sects. Since al Shahrastānī sees the relationship between orthodoxy and the sects as genetic, and since he regards the sect as essentially a religious phenomenon, an analysis of either orthodoxy or the sects will clarify the other. The title which al Shahrastānī chose for his work clearly indicates the genetic interrelationship between sects and religions. In this, al Shahrastānī agrees with the majority of modern sociologists of religion. Roger O'Toole states that the term "sect" has, for many sociologists, come to be closely associated with the sociology of religion, and sociologists of religion have, for the most part, encouraged this state of affairs by regarding the sect as an essentially religious phenomenon. Sociological literature on sectarianism is almost completely concerned with religious phenomena and for many sociologists the idea of a "non-religious" sect would appear to be a contradiction in terms."[1]

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[1]O'Toole quotes H. Richard Niebuhr's article "Sects" in Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 13, 1937, as stating: "In recent years the sociological analysis of religion has led to the adoption of the term sect for one particular type of division and organization. It has come to denote a religious conflict society which arises in opposition to an institutional church; based on the definite commitment of mature individuals to a definite set of principles. . . ." See Roger O'Toole, A Consideration of "Sect" as an exclusively

Caesar E. Farah maintains that al Shahrastānī's "predecessors" who dwelt on the subject of the sects "made unclear differentiations among them."[1] According to him, al Shahrastānī "endeavored to distinguish between them on the basis of how they reacted to the principal areas of controversy over religious doctrine."[2] Farah continues his argument by saying that "For a premise in distinguishing between the schools and classifying them, he chose the position each adopted regarding points of contention in doctrinal interpretation."[3] At the same time, al Shahrastānī was able to classify "the opposing schools or those who held divergent views."[4] According to Farah, "this categorization of positions on doctrinal views into factions . . . accounts for the principal schools of thought that have endeavored to interpret Islamic doctrine, often to justify positions which did not always accord with the prevailing orthodox view."[5]

It is the religious factor which binds the root with the branch. The same genetic relation is to be found, for al Shahrastānī, between philosophies and schools of thought; but this is not our concern at the moment.

Religious Concept: Notes on "Underground" Traditions in the Study of Sectarianism, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Chicago, Ill., October 21-23, 1971, pp. 1-2.

[1]Farah, p. 200.

[2]Ibid., p. 200.

[3]Ibid., p. 201.

[4]Ibid., p. 201.

[5]Ibid., p. 201.

Al Shahrastānī applies his structural analysis, the theory of which we have explained in the previous pages, to the doctrines and founders of the many Islamic sects. In Islamic doctrine he found four "categories of differentiation," the four "Great Roots": "I have tried to place [these doctrines] into four categories which are the great 'uṣūl (roots, or principles)."[1] These are the categories of God's Attributes and His Unity (al Ṣifāt wa al Tawḥīd), Decree and Justice (al Qadar wa al ᶜAdl), Promise and Threatening (al Waᶜd wa al Waᶜīd), and finally Tradition and Reason (al Samᶜ wa al ᶜAql) [diagram, p. 310]. The founders who took a definite stand on one of these four principal doctrinal questions, the "categories of differentiation," their opinions will be considered doctrines and their followers sects.[2] Other groups will be included under one of these major sects according to the nature of their beliefs, and these will constitute the branches, i.e., sub-sects.[3] (Al Shahrastānī's "categories of differentiation" with the problems and sects that come under them are illustrated in the diagram, p. 310)

From a cross-analysis of these four categories of differentiation with the problems and sects that are included respectively under

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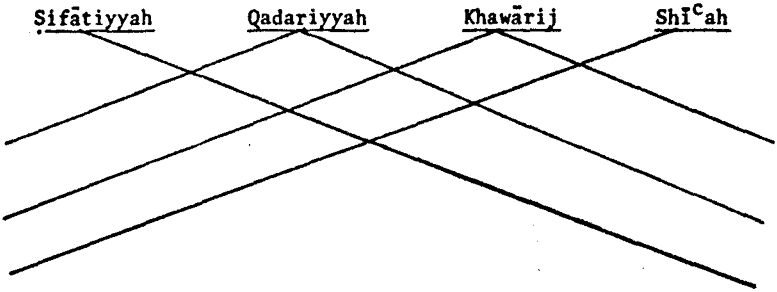
[1]p. 4.

[2]p. 5. A definition of "sect" is implicitly given here as a group of people professing particular opinions with regard to one or more specifically defined problems. As Dominique Sourdel comments: "Selon lui, en effet, ne doit être considéré comme "secte" qu'un groupe professant des opinions particulières sur une au moins des questions ainsi définies." See his article "La Classification Des Sectes Islamiques Dans le Kitāb al-Milal d'Al-Shahrastānī," p. 244.

[3]p. 5.

them, al Shahrastānī finds four main divisions, the Qadariyyah, the Ṣifātiyyah, the Khawārij and the Shī^{c}ah; these four divisions "are structured with each other [i.e. they interrelate]" (yatarakkab ba^{c}ḍuhā ma^{c}a ba^{c}ḍ).[1] "From each of these divisions branch different kinds of sects (aṣnāf) until there are seventy-three sects."[2] See diagram.

THE FOUR MAIN ISLAMIC SECTS



Total number of these structures and sub-structures is 73 sects

These seventy-three sects, according to al Shahrastānī, can then be studied through two methods. The first is to consider the doctrinal questions as 'ūṣūl, that is principles or main structures, and then describe under each question the doctrine of each sect. Ibn Ḥazm's Al Fiṣal fi al Milal wa al Niḥal is a good example of this type. The second method is to consider the founders as 'uṣūl and describe the opinions of the founder on each doctrinal question.[3] (See diagram) Because of its scientific exactness al Shahrastānī preferred the second

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[1]p. 5.

[2]p. 5.

[3]p. 5.

method for his own study: "the arrangement of this compendium follows the latter method, because I found it to give greater control to the classification and it is in accord with the divisions (*'abwāb*) or categories of mathematics."[1]

TWO METHODS IN CLASSIFYING THE 73 SECTS

Method I
Problems

Under each problem, the doctrines of each sect one after the other

Method II
Founders

Under each founder, the doctrines in one problem after the other

The Method of al Shahrastānī

b. The Structural Study of the Sects of the Religions of the World

Al Shahrastānī applied the categories which he developed for his structural classification of Islamic sects to the sects of all the world's religions. Even his classification of philosophies and schools of thought uses similar categories. Because his system was universal, he did not need to reconsider his methodology with each religion. Instead he was able to proceed smoothly from Islām to other religions, analyzing their sects, although in less detail than the sects of Islām. Sometimes he limited his study to the best known sects of the religion

[1]p. 5.

CATEGORIES OF DIFFERENTIATI

4		3		
Tradition, Reason, Prophetic Mission, Leadership, "Al Sam^{c}, Al ^{c}aql, Al Risālah, Al Imāmah"		Promise, Threatening, Divine Names, Decisions, "Al Wa^{c}d, Al Wa^{c}īd, Al 'Smā', Al Aḥkām"		Decree and Ju "Al Qadar, Al
Problems	Sects	Problems	Sects	Problems
The determination of actions as good (taḥsīn)	Al Shī^{c}ah	Faith (Imān)	Al Murji'ah	Destiny (qaḍā
The determination of actions as evil (taqbīḥ)	Al Khawārij	Repentence (tawbah)	Al Wa^{c}īdiyyah	Decree (qadar
The advantageous (al ṣalāḥ)	Al Mu^{c}tazilah	Threatening (wa^{c}īd)	Al Mu^{c}tazilah	Predestinatic force (jabr)
The most advantageous (al 'aṣlaḥ)	Al Karrāmiyyah	Postponing ('irjā')	Al Ash^{c}ariyyah	Acquisition (kasb)
Benignity (luṭf)	Al Ash^{c}ariyyah	Pronouncing anyone an unbeliever (takfīr)	Al Karrāmiyyah	The Willing o good and evil
The Infallibility of Prophets (^{c}iṣmah)		Leading anyone astray (taḍlīl)		The decreed a the known
Conditions of al Imāmah by statute (naṣṣ) to some and by agreement (ijmā^{c}) to others		(as affirmed by some and denied by others)		(as affirmed some and deni by others)

OF DIFFERENTIATION

2		1	
Decree and Justice "Al Qadar, Al ^{c}adl"		Attributes and Unity "Al Ṣifāt, Al Tawḥīd"	
Problems	Sects	Problems	Sects
Destiny (qaḍā')	Al Qadariyyah	Eternal attributes (affirmed by some and denied by others)	Al Ash^{c}ariyyah
Decree (qadar)	Al Najjāriyyah	Attributes of essence	Al Karrāmiyyah
Predestination or force (jabr)	Al Jabriyyah	Attributes of action	Al Mujassimah
Acquisition (kasb)	Al Ash^{c}ariyyah	What is necessary in God, what is possible for Him, and what is impossible	Al Mu^{c}tazilah
The Willing of good and evil	Al Karrāmiyyah		
The decreed and the known			
(as affirmed by some and denied by others)			

under investigation, for example with Judaism: "And [the Jews] are differentiated into seventy-one sects. Among these we will mention the most famous and the most popular."[1] He applied the same principle to Christianity: "And the Christians later became divided into seventy-two sects, the greatest among them being al Malkā'iyyah, al Nesṭūriyyah, and al Yaᶜqūbiyyah. From these branched al Elyāniyyah, al Bilyārsiyyah, al Maqdānūsiyyah, al Sibāliyyah, al Būṭīnūsiyyah, and al Būliyyah, and the rest of the sects."[2]

However, this omission does not affect al Shahrastānī's description of these religions and their sects according to his plan. The same applies to the religions of the Magians and Manichaeism. He usually starts with reporting the main concepts of each religion, taking them as his categories of differentiation, and then turns to the study of the sects, differentiating them according to their understanding of these main concepts. He classifies these religions too according to the founders of sects, recording the founder's opinion on each major doctrinal question. Thus, for example, in his study of Judaism and its sects, he begins with a study of the concept of law, the concept of abrogation, anthropomorphism, free-will, pre-destination, resurrection and the Messiah. These concepts are the "categories of differentiation" under which the sects of Judaism are to be classified. The sects which he distinguishes as the most important are: (1) the

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[1] p. 167.

[2] p. 173.

ᶜAnāniyyah, followers of ᶜAnān;[1] (2) the ᶜIsawiyyah, the followers of Abi-ᶜĪsā Isḥāq ben Yaᶜqūb al Aṣfahānī known as עבר אלהים ;[2] (3) the Maqāribah and the Yudhaᶜāniyyah, followers of Yudhaᶜān, known also as Yehūdā;[3] (4) Al Sāmirah. The most important sub-sects which are mentioned by al Shahrastānī are the Mushkāniyyah, a sub-sect of the Yudhaᶜāniyyah,[4] and the Dustāniyyah and the Kusāniyyah are mentioned as sub-sects of the Sāmirah. His description of these two last sub-sects seems to refer to the Pharisees and the Sadducees.[5] To facilitate the description of some of the doctrines of some of these sects, al Shahrastānī compared them with their counterpart among the Islamic sects. A good example is his contrast, on the question of qadar, "free-will," between Jewish sects and Islamic sects: "As to the question of free-will, they differ on it in a manner similar to the two parties in Islām. Thus, the Rabbinites among them are like the Muᶜtazilah among us; and the Karaites resemble the Jabriyyah and the Mushabbihah."[6]

As "categories of differentiation" among Christian sects, al Shahrastānī chooses the nature of Christ, his birth, resurrection and ascension, the Trinity and the Logos. He classifies the most important

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[1] p. 167.

[2] p. 168.

[3] p. 168.

[4] p. 169.

[5] p. 170.

[6] p. 164.

sects and then takes the founder of each sect and explains his opinion on each of the categories of differentiation. The same tendency for comparing sects with Islamic sects is repeated here; the most prominent example is his likening the Nestorians to the Muᶜtazilah.[1]

As to the religions of the Magians, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, al Shahrastānī discusses their sects on the bases of two "categories of differentiation": "As to the problems of the Majūs, they all revolve around two categories. One of them is the mingling (constitution) of light into darkness. The second is the purification of light from darkness. Accordingly, they see the mingling as a beginning and the purification as an end."[2] Al Shahrastānī next turns to his analysis of the sects, beginning with what he calls the "original Magians," for whom the two principles of light and darkness are not both eternal. Only the substance of light is eternal (<u>'azalī</u>) whereas the substance of darkness is created (<u>muḥdathah</u>).[3] From the original group three main sects came into existence, taking different views and developing new systems of belief on the basis of the above two categories of differentiation. They are the Kiyomerthiyyah, followers of Kiyomerth,[4]

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[1]p. 175. Al Shahrastānī indicates that Nesṭūr's interpretation of the Gospel according to his own reasoning "resembles what the Muᶜtazilah have added to this <u>sharīᶜah</u> (Islām)." He again states that "the closest doctrine to that of Nesṭūr on the three <u>'aqānīm</u> (persons of the Godhead) is the position of Abī Hāshim, the Muᶜtazilite who assigns different essences to one thing." p. 175.

[2]p. 182.

[3]p. 182.

[4]p. 182.

Zurwāniyyah, followers of Zurwān,[1] and al Zurādishtiyyah, followers of Zurādisht.[2] Under each of these three sects, al Shahrastānī records briefly some of the sub-divisions and their main differences. Again, the category of the founder is applied here.

Al Shahrastānī appears to find the origin of the Dualist system of belief in the Magians' concept of the two substances of light and darkness.[3] The Dualists, however, believed in the eternity of both principles despite their respective differences in essence, nature, action, place, and form (corporeal or spiritual).[4]

Manichaeaism is considered as a "blending of the Magian beliefs with Christianity."[5] The Manichaeans assert the eternity of both light and darkness, while admitting some differences in their particular essences and natures.[6] Al Shahrastānī analyzes the Manichaean sects according to the categories of differentiation he set up for the Magians, the mingling of light into darkness and the purification of light. He mentions six sects among the Manichaeans, the Mazdakiyyah, the Dayṣāniyyah, the Marqūniyyah, the Kīnawiyyah, and the Ṣiyāmiyyah, and the Tanāsukhiyyah.[7] The first two sects still hold to the dualistic

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[1]p. 183.

[2]p. 185.

[3]p. 181.

[4]p. 188.

[5]p. 188.

[6]p. 188.

[7]p. 197.

principle of light and darkness with special emphasis on the struggle between good and evil, a trend of thought which started with Zoroaster and was followed by Mānī.[1] The two sects differ on the nature of blending and purification.

The Marqūniyyah are distinguished by their belief in a third realm beside light and darkness which al Shahrastānī calls al mu^caddil al jāmi^c (literally, "the blending proportioner"), which is the "cause of blending" of the two "conflicting" and "contradictory" substances of light and darkness. Its status is "beyond light" and "above darkness."[2] Al Shahrastānī compares this sect with the sect of Mānī and with Zoroastrianism, indicating that Mānī based his doctrine on the Marqūniyyah, but rejected their concept of mu^caddil which Zoroastrianism accepted, not as the essence which mediates between light and darkness but rather as the "judge over the two antagonists."[3]

The Kīnawiyyah are distinguished by their rejection of the dualistic realms of light and darkness. Instead, they believe in three original substances: fire, earth and water. The source of good is fire while that of evil is water, and the earth is the state in between.[4] Among the Kīnawiyyah, there are the Ṣiyāmiyyah, distinguished by their ascetic tendencies,[5] and the Tanāsukhiyyah, who

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[1]p. 186.

[2]p. 195.

[3]p. 196.

[4]p. 196.

[5]p. 197.

believe in the transmigration of souls and emphasize the reward and punishment implied in the transmigration phenomenon. However, they differ from all dualists on the nature of the purification of light from darkness. For them, the purification means "the return of the parts of light to its higher realm" and the "remaining of the parts of darkness in the lower realm."[1]

In the distinctions established between these various sects, the "categories of differentiation," along with the category of the founder, have been used as the controlling factors in the structural analysis of sects. Without these categories, the relationships between the sects would be hard to establish and their connections with the sub-sects would be even more obscure. The founders add a historical element to the categories. History gives factuality to the relational perspectives established between sects. It is not interest in history as historicism, but rather in history as it flows between different sects, which concerns al Shahrastānī. He sees each sect as structured by and giving structure to some other sect. In other words, the sects are not viewed as static elements with no dynamic relation between them. Piaget defines this quality in structuralism as the "system of transformation" which he ascribes to "all known structures -- from mathematical groups to kinship systems."[2] According to him, without this idea of transformation, "structures would lose all explanatory import, since

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[1]p. 197.

[2]Piaget, p. 11.

they would collapse into static forms."[1] As we have seen with al Shahrastānī, the sects are viewed not only as related to each other as elements of one whole-structure, but also as related to an origin from which they all derive. In structuralism again this relation between the branching elements and the original type is expressed as the relation between "transformation and formation"[2] which makes the question of the origin central to the idea of transformation. We have noted earlier that with al Shahrastānī each sect constitutes a structure by itself and each sub-sect also constitutes a structure, when it is viewed in its individuality, and within its own boundaries. In structural thought, this phenomenon is called self-regulation, which entails, according to Piaget, self-maintenance and closure. According to Piaget "the transformations inherent in a structure never lead beyond the system but always engender elements that belong to it and preserve its laws. . . . It is in this sense that a structure is 'closed,' a notion perfectly compatible with the structure's being considered a substructure of a larger one; but in being treated as a substructure, a structure does not lose its own boundaries; the larger structure does not 'annex' the substructure. . . ."[3] In al Shahrastānī's treatment of the sects, each sect can be seen distinct from all other sects, "self-regulated," "self-maintained" and "closed," to use Piaget's expressions. At the same time, that sect can be seen in relation to the other sects.

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[1]Piaget, p. 12.

[2]Ibid., p. 12.

[3]Ibid., p. 14.

in this case, it is seen in its transformed condition, structured within the whole of the sects and giving structure to other members in this whole.

Structural analysis is also recommended by many scholars of religion to complement their historical concern. As Kitagawa points out, the nature of the discipline of Religionswissenschaft "must hold within it both 'historical' and 'structural' approaches and methodologies. To be sure, most scholars agree that 'historical' and 'structural' approaches are closely interrelated, and they try to combine them in one way or another."[1] In actual practice, however, Kitagawa claims that historians of religions tend to stress one of these two approaches. According to him, the problem of understanding "requires a hermeneutical principle which would enable us to harmonize the insights and contributions of both historical and structural inquiries without at the same time doing injustice to the methodological integrity of either approach."[2] In al Shahrastānī's work, a balance is kept between structure and history. Both characterize his contribution to religious understanding.

4. The Comparative Method

a. Common Features as Basis for Comparison

The very essence of al Shahrastānī's work is comparative. On

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[1]"Primitive, Classical, and Modern Religions: A Perspective on Understanding the History of Religions," in The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding, p. 42.

[2]Ibid., p. 42.

the broadest level, comparisons between different civilizations, their attitudes, and understandings of the universe and the nature of things were given by al Shahrastānī in the form of cultural contrasts. Accordingly, cultures were classified in accordance with their specific characteristics. Thus, the Arabs and the Indians were seen to have cultural patterns different from the Romans and the Persians. Comparative analyses were also introduced between the different philosophical opinions and schools. This section in al Shahrastānī's book constitutes a fine piece in comparative philosophy. Another area of comparative analysis contrasts religion with philosophy, discussing their different natures, sources, objectives and methods. Among the religions, the category of revelation in the form of a Book is applied as a criterion for comparative religions. The classification which follows on the basis of revelation is a comparative study of world religions with regard to the manner in which they approach revelation, whether positively or negatively, and consequently the type of Scripture they hold.

In each religion, as explained before, a set of "categories of differentiation" is formulated as common features shared in a greater or lesser degree by the sects of each religion. These define the relation of the sects to each other and their relation to the religion from which they are derived. The divisions and sub-divisions also clarify the origin and development of the sects and the doctrinal issues on which they agree or disagree. Also, the degrees of influences exercised by the sects become clear. This in itself is indicative of the comparative method as a tool through which the interrelationships between sects

and doctrinal problems are clarified. This is where al Shahrastānī's work goes beyond the methodology of earlier works. Previous writers limited themselves to recording religions and sects without any attempt to link the content of each to the other and to trace their historical development back to an original source. Sects were discussed as separate entities with no possible connections. Al Shahrastānī departed from this method by clarifying the relationships between religions and sects through extracting common features and then seeing each religion and sect in their light. The first statements in al Shahrastani's work define for us his objectives and their comparative basis. He says,

> As God had enabled me to learn the beliefs of mankind -- those who belong to religions and sects as well as those who belong to various philosophies and schools -- to master their source-books and texts, to understand their popular and sophisticated views, I decided to collect this knowledge in a brief book for the stimulation of research and the guidance of the seeking student. . . . My purpose is to show the thought of men of religion and the views of others from Adam onwards, according to the clearest and most comprehensive plan, to confirm their sincere claim, to harmonize their dissonant views, and to bring together their divergences. . . .[1]

Thus, the search for common denominator and a common essence in world religions has been defined as one of the objectives of the comparative work.

The foundation of the comparative method lies in discovering common criteria in the content of religions and sects. The element of comparison must derive basically from the religions and sects and not be imposed from the outside. Al Shahrastānī's method centered around

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[1]Al Fārūqī, "Islām," in The Great Asian Religions, p. 326.

the main concepts or beliefs, reducing them to basic structures from which other beliefs were derived. These main concepts were considered as "categories of differentiation," that is, common features for comparison. The positive or negative response of the religions and sects towards these features marks their relationships. Al Shahrastānī made use of oppositions between religions and sects not only as a way of comparing them but most significantly as leading factors in matters pertaining to structure. Opposite sects with extremely contradicting beliefs could be included within one structure simply because they are identical in being opposites.

The religions and the sects were classified according to their understanding of the basic "categories of differentiation." Some share all of these categories and some share few or none of them. At the same time there were varying degrees of disagreements about one category or more. A historical element is added to the comparative element by establishing the category of the "founder," under which the description of each sect is systematically given. The founders provide us with a historical consciousness of the content of religions and their sects and the sects that were derived from them.

For al Shahrastānī, the purpose of the use of comparative analysis is to discover the common and the unique among the religions and sects. The common is that which is shared by a group of religions or sects. The unique is that which is peculiar to them and does not have parallels in others. Under each religion and sect, he describes "what is common (mā yaᶜummu aṣnāfahā) to its type in terms of doctrines and beliefs and under each type what distinguishes and characterizes it

from others (mā khaṣṣahu wa 'infarada bihi ᶜan aṣḥābihi)."[1]

The search for the common and the unique has been characteristic of modern studies in comparative religion. This notion has resulted in the formulation of a number of criteria indicative of the common and the unique. Schleiermacher was among the early students of religion to search for such elements in religious phenomena. His goal as quoted by Frick was this:

> . . . to determine both, what is common and what is unique, in forms of belief in a general connection, to represent what is common as including all historically existent forms of belief and establish the unique factors, after the introduction of a basic thought by means of a correct division, as a complete whole, and in this way to settle the relation of every form of belief to all other forms of belief, and to classify them according to their affinities and gradations, would be the true function of that branch of scholarly research.[2]

The relation between Schleiermacher's system and that of al Shahrastānī is quite obvious and needs no elaboration.

Recently, historians of religions have focused on the search for basic religious structures as a means for locating the common and the unique. Briefly, the most important discoveries in this direction are given in Rudolf Otto's "law of parallels" in the history of religions, utilizing categories such as 'homologous' and 'analogous.' Among these, Wach's notions of the 'classical' and the 'universal' are used as systematic principles through which "some order" is brought to religious phenomena in world religions.[3] He substitutes the "classical"

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[1]p. 23.

[2]Frick, pp. 483-484.

[3]Wach, Types of Religious Experience, p. 51.

for Herder's notion of the "characteristic" as a criterion for representing typical patterns among religious phenomena. Wach's aim is to concentrate on the "essential" and "necessary" elements which are frequently manifested in these religions and formulate them as rules of comparison and differentiation. The notion of the "classical," Wach maintains, has "to be conceived elastically. It is not meant to establish a closed canon of forms, but rather to allow for a steady increase of our awareness of new historical phenomena and their systematic evaluation."[1] The "universal" is also used by Wach "to distinguish between what is religious and what is not."[2] Religious experience is universal in the empirical sense, in its structure and in its tendency towards expression theoretical, practical and sociological.[3] Like al Shahrastānī, Wach considers also the role played by religious founders and personalities. For him, they also represent "something typical" and their "role must also be presented."[4]

The "patterns" of Eliade are another modern attempt to formulate criteria for the classification of religious phenomena. As he explains his method: "What I intend is to introduce my readers to the labyrinthine complexity of religious data, their basic patterns, and the variety of cultures they reflect."[5] He examines various

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[1]Wach, Types of Religious Experience, p. 56.

[2]Ibid., p. 31.

[3]Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[4]Wach, Understanding and Believing, pp. 139-140.

[5]Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, pp. xvi-xvii.

"hierophanies," that is, manifestations of the sacred at different "cosmic levels" in order to discover their religious forms and history.[1] Each pattern constitutes a whole by itself, "both morphologically and historically."[2] Eliade's "patterns," however, do not explain the role of religious founders and figures. His work on the patterns is criticized for its lack of historical analysis as we read in the following:

> For years Eliade has been criticized for failing to write the companion volume to Patterns in Comparative Religion, which was to have been the history of religions, thus balancing the morphological analysis of Patterns with a genuinely historical approach. . . . [Eliade's] approach has remained consistently ahistorical, in spite of the impression conveyed by his attention to historical data.[3]

Van der Leeuw develops structures which he considers as "organic wholes."[4] In these structures, reality is "significantly organized."[5] Van der Leeuw expressed also the importance of religious figures as he states: "religious experience assumes historic form" through the founder's personality.[6] Like Eliade's, Van der Leeuw's approach is criticized for its neglect of historical elements. This kind of criticism is applied generally to most phenomenologists who in their turn claim that by avoiding historical implications and by avoiding a history of religion devoted to the study of the particular, they reach a

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[1]Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, p. xv.

[2]Ibid., p. xvi.

[3]Dudley, G. Eliade and the Recovery of Archaic Religions, pp. 26-27.

[4]Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, p. 672.

[5]Ibid., p. 672.

[6]Ibid., p. 650.

universality otherwise unrealized.

The comparative method which al Shahrastānī developed resolves the issue of structure and history in the study of religion. His structural criterion, the categories of differentiation (qawā^c^id al Khilāf) is complemented by the other criterion of the founders (aṣḥāb) in order to provide a description of religious phenomena which organizes the data in their historical context. His structures recognize also both the "common" and the "unique." In the common, a regularity or a universal pattern dominates, but not by sacrificing the particular or the individual. As we have seen in his classifications of sects, each sect is viewed at once as structured by and as providing structure to others. Here, the sect appears both in its independent individuality and in its relation to the rest of the sects. Both what is unique to it and what it has in common with others are manifested. Both lie within each other in the same whole-structure.

b. The Hermeneutical Foundation of Comparison

We can deduce from al Shahrastānī's work some hermeneutical rules for comparative work as general principles to guide the comparativist not only in religion but in all disciplines where a comparative approach is found useful.

1. First among these hermeneutical principles is the necessity for agreement on the meanings given to the concepts to be compared. This principle is a prefatory warning to the comparativist to be sure of the meanings commonly attributed to the different concepts he compares; thus he will avoid errors caused by misconceptions. Accordingly,

the first stage of the comparative work is hermeneutical, the clarification and definition of the meanings of the concepts to be compared. This reminds us of Max Müller's dictum that before we compare we should know what we are comparing. W.C. Smith understands the function of comparative religion as to establish a hermeneutical foundation for research in religion. He states: ". . . it is the business of comparative religion to construct statements about religion that are intelligible within at least two traditions simultaneously."[1] The practical aspect of this 'business' is seen by Smith in the encounter of world religions. According to him, "People wishing to talk together across religious frontiers have been finding that their conceptions of one another's faiths, their capacity to explicate their own faiths in terms that can be understood by outsiders, and the concepts of mutual discourse available to them jointly, are inadequate. They turn to comparative religion to supply this."[2] Without clarification of meanings, corresponding concepts in different religions or philosophies cannot be classified together. Even the comparison of two concepts on the basis of the meaning they share should be guarded against the presuppositions that are attached to the concepts themselves. As this implies, there are additional meanings given to a concept that do not pertain to its essential meaning; and to clear the way for the comparative task, the concept under investigation must be reduced to its essential character and cleared of all additional interpretations that

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[1]Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither -- and Why?" in The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, p. 52.

[2]Ibid., p. 52.

have been ascribed to it at one time or another.

To document this principle from al Shahrastānī's work, we shall use examples from the dialogue constructed between the Ḥanīfs and the Ṣabeans.[1] The first example will consider the case when two concepts have different meanings in two different religious traditions; valid comparison is impossible unless a single meaning is given to both concepts. The comparison between the "purely spiritual" (al rūḥānī al maḥḍ) and the "humanly prophetic" (al bashariyyatu al nabawiyyah)[2] would demand first the elucidation of the meanings of these two concepts. According to al Shahrastānī, the misconceptions about these two concepts developed because the Ṣabeans made the comparison between "two absolute perfections" (Kamālayn muṭlaqan), both equally valuable, and thus their judgment resulted in the preference of one "perfection" to another.[3] The Ḥanīfs, however, did not regard the two concepts as "two absolute perfections," and ascribed a different status to each of them. To them, one is perfection and the second is a perfection which gives perfection to something other than itself (kamālun huwa mukammilu ghayrihi).[4] After establishing the different meanings and values given

[1]As is the case in the modern period, the dialogue, in general, is one of the comparative tools which al Shahrastānī uses for understanding the content of religions and philosophies. Its foundations are based on the same hermeneutical principles which characterize al Shahrastānī's comparative method. The dialogue within the comparative study presents an empirical and practical tool for making comparisons based on direct contact between men of different faiths.

[2]p. 205.

[3]p. 207.

[4]p. 207.

to these concepts, al Shahrastānī proceeds to pave the way for agreement between the two parties on the meaning of the concepts by involving them into a discussion of the meaning of "perfection" in relation to both the "spiritual" (al rūḥānī) and the "corporeal" (al jismānī). He shows that it is wrong to compare and contrast two abstracts, the spiritual and the corporeal, because the spiritual will naturally be preferred to the corporeal. Any comparison, as al Shahrastānī indicates, must be between two concepts which are related by some common elements and not between two absolutely opposite concepts.

He expressed this in the words he gave to the Ḥanīf arguing with the Ṣabeans: "Your misconception arose from two causes: first you compared the abstract spiritual (al rūḥānī al mujarrad) with the abstract corporeal (al jismānī al mujarrad), and you rightly gave preference to al rūḥānī. However, the comparison (al mufāḍalah) should be between the abstract spiritual and the combined corporeal and spiritual (al jismānī wa al rūḥānī al mujtami^{c})."[1] In such a case, it would be difficult to give preference to the "abstract spiritual" because in one way it is equal to the "combined corporeal and spiritual" and in another way it is not equal.[2] This example implies a principle according to which not only may concepts be compared, but their relative value may be judged. Both of these related functions are implied in the term mufāḍalah, used by al Shahrastānī to mean both comparison and evaluation, that is a comparison resulting in a judgement between the

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[1]p. 206.

[2]p. 206.

two concepts compared.

This principle is illustrated by a linguistic parallel. In language, according to al Shahrastānī, one does not compare an "abstract expression" (lafẓ mujarrad) to an "abstract meaning" (maᶜnā mujarrad). Comparison must be essentially between two meanings. As al Shahrastānī indicates: "This is like someone who chooses between the abstract expression and the abstract meaning, and therefore prefers the meaning. To him, it should be said: No, you will have to choose between the abstract meaning on the one hand, and the expression with its implied meaning on the other."[1]

The other cause of confusion is concerned with the different understandings of the nature of prophecy. The Ṣabeans regard prophecy as "pure perfection and completion," while the Ḥanīfs understand prophecy as a perfection in relation to something else.[2] Prophecy in the second meaning is functional, whereas the first meaning is abstract and absolute. Thus, the two kinds of perfections must be set into different categories before any comparison would be possible. In order to bridge the gap between the two understandings of the same concept, functions which both understandings share can provide common ground for the comparative work. In this case, this is done through the attempt to prove that "not every spiritual entity is perfect in all aspects and not every corporeal entity is imperfect in all its aspects."[3] It is shown

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[1]p. 207.

[2]p. 207.

[3]p. 209.

that the corporeal world has a perfect "designer" or "disposer" (mudabbir) which can be compared to the "designer" of the spiritual world. According to the Ṣabeans this "designer" is called the "first spirit" (al rūḥ al awwal), and for the Ḥanīfs it is the "messenger" (al rasūl). These two concepts may be compared because a "rational affinity and proportion" (munāsabah wa mulāqah ᶜaqliyyah) exists between them.[1] This harmony which al Shahrastānī emphasizes between various understandings of the meaning of concepts has constituted part of the modern discussion on religion. E. Ehnmark "laid stress upon the importance of a careful analysis of the fundamental conceptions (Grundbegriffe) which are used in Religionswissenschaft -- like the idea of God, or that of sin."[2] He defines the problem in a way closer to al Shahrastānī's understanding when he states: "The question is to know how the respective terms and notions are used in their context, and to be most careful in order not to compare items which essentially should not be compared; pure historical and philological research must form the basis of every study in the field of history of religions."[3]

2. Another general principle for comparative work can be deduced from al Shahrastānī's division of the content of religion into "roots" and "branches" ('uṣūl wa furūᶜ). According to him, "religion

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[1]p. 211.

[2]"Summary of the Discussion" by Annemarie Schimmel in Numen, Vol. VII, Fasc. 2-3 (December 1960), p. 238. This discussion followed a paper by C.J. Bleeker, entitled "The future task of the History of Religions," submitted to the General Assembly of the IAHR at Marburg, Sept. 17, 1960.

[3]Ibid., p. 238.

is divided into knowledge and obedience; knowledge is a root and obedience is a branch."[1] In the same place, he defines 'uṣūl as "any problem in which truth has to be established between two opponents" and thus, "knowledge and unity" are problems of 'uṣūl while "obedience and sharīcah" come under the category of "branches." The "roots" are the subject of the science of Kalām, "systematic theology," and furūc are the subject of the science of fiqh, "jurisprudence."[2]

Now, the comparativist should work in accordance with these divisions. A problem of 'uṣūl should be compared only to a corresponding problem of 'uṣūl in other religions. Similarly, a problem of furūc should be compared only with its kind. To violate this rule is to fall into the error of comparing two concepts which belong to two different categories. To put this into the language of the scientific study of religion, the 'uṣūl constitute the theoretical aspects of religion. Furūc, on the other hand, are concerned with the practical and ritualistic aspects. Any valid comparison between religions must accept the difference between these two realms.

3. A third general principle is that comparative studies should take the task of clarifying effect and influence as part and parcel of comparative analysis. Similarities between groups of religions with their sects, or philosophies with their schools, suggest that the ideas of these groups may have come into contact at one historical period or another. Al Shahrastānī gave considerable importance to the task of

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[1] p. 28.

[2] p. 28.

tracing doctrines to an original source, foreign or domestic, in religious and philosophical traditions. His classification of religions, sects, philosophies and schools points to overlapping elements which indicate either a common source or some influence of one group upon another. In some cases, al Shahrastānī tries to show the tendency of some sects and schools to synthesize divergent views. This kind of synthesis gave birth to religions such as Manichaeism and sects such as that founded by Abū ᶜAbdullah ibn al Karrām of Sijistān. The first tried to reconcile Magian doctrines with those of Christianity;[1] the second "gathered parts from each doctrine"[2] and put it in a book and circulated it until the work itself "became a doctrine" in some of the regions of Khurāsān.[3]

c. <u>Degrees of Comparison</u>

Al Shahrastānī distinguished degrees of comparison in the relationship of one religion or sect to another. In this he stressed the role of personalities, in the transmission of ideas from founders to other religious leaders and thinkers. The degree of relationship between these individuals can be established by assessing exactly how much of their ideas is transmitted, and the changes which occur in the process of transmission.

First among the degrees of comparison is full agreement with

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[1]p. 188.

[2]p. 20.

[3]p. 20.

the founder of a doctrine. In such a case, the act of obedience is perfectly represented. The comparison here need not be elaborated because there is no deviation from the essential principles established by the founder.

The first real change in the transmission of doctrines comes when the followers accept the founder's doctrines but tend to add something to them. Al Shahrastānī calls this degree of comparison muwāfaqah ma^c^a ziyādah;[1] that is, an agreement coupled with material added to the founder's main arguments. What is added here is original, not merely explanatory or interpretive. This same degree of comparison is also called muwāfaqah ma^c^a damm (to agree, but at the same time include other ideas that were not given by the original founder)[2] and muwāfaqah ma^c^a iḥdāth (to agree, but at the same time create something new and add it to the founder's doctrine).[3] In the majority of the cases where addition and innovation constitute the major change, the added doctrines are marked by their radical characteristics when compared to the founder's doctrine.[4] This radicality leads logically to another degree of comparison, which al Shahrastānī calls muwāfaqah ma^c^a mukhālafah, i.e., an agreement coupled with a basic difference or differences from the founder's doctrine.[5] In this case one or more of the founder's doctrines are rejected, while the rest are accepted. An

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[1]pp. 41, 48.

[2]p. 42.

[3]p. 38.

[4]pp. 42-44.

[5]p. 41.

opposite case occurs when we have an agreement with the founder coupled with an exaggeration of one or more of his doctrines. Al Shahrastānī calls such a case muwāfaqah ma^{c}a mughālāh (an agreement with exaggeration).[1]

Another group of degrees of comparison is concerned with a different set of responses to the founder's doctrine. First among these is the case when the founder of a sect distinguishes himself from the original founder by taking up certain specific problems and devoting himself to their clarification, producing results which are radically different from the founder's understanding of these problems. These results can sometimes be considered as extensions to the original doctrines. This phenomenon is called al infirād bi masā'il (to distinguish one's self by taking up certain problems among those [discussed by] the original doctrine).[2] Another category is to agree with the general concepts and disagree about their details. This is called ikhtilāf fī al tafṣīl, "disagreement about the details."[3]

Yet another degree of comparison is exemplified when a doctrine contains elements from two or more known doctrines. This case is called mazj, khalṭ, or jam^{c} (to mix or intermingle together doctrines of different qualities). This occurs most often when religious doctrines are mingled with philosophical ideas.[4] In all these cases, the

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[1]p. 53.

[2]pp. 34, 37.

[3]p. 81.

[4]pp. 37, 107, 18.

original doctrine has different degrees of influence upon later doctrines. The expressions which are used to indicate influences between different religions, sects, philosophies and schools include such terms as 'akhdh, naql and 'iqtibās.[1] All imply the adoption of some concepts taken from a founder of a doctrine other than that professed by the person who accepts the concepts.

5. Objectivity, Value-Judgment and the Problem of Truth

From our previous analysis of al Shahrastānī's methodology in the study of religion, it has become clear that he consistently applied a strict scientific approach to the data of his study. This scientific quality was deepened by al Shahrastānī's objectivity, a concept to which he had given profound concern in his work. Although his thoughts on objectivity and value-judgment occur in the first pages of his book, we have preferred to discuss them after our analysis of his method in the study of religions and sects. Thus, we thought, his objectivity would be evident in the analytic and practical implementations of his work which we discussed in previous chapters. Now, however, we find it necessary to discuss the theoretical aspects of this issue, mainly in order to show that al Shahrastānī's objectivity is not merely the product of a scientific method, but also the result of an awareness that the subjective stand of earlier writers on religions and sects seriously affected their work.

As a problem of methodology, al Shahrastānī expresses his ideas

[1] pp. 34, 48.

on objectivity, value-judgment and truth in the first and second of the five methodological introductions to his book. This fact shows us that from the beginning of his work, he was aware of these problems and the far-reaching effect they could have on the study he was intending to undertake. The early place he gave to these problems also implies a criticism of earlier works which soon becomes explicit in other places in his work.

In the conclusion to the second methodological introduction, al Shahrastānī laid the foundation for the objective study of religions and sects. As he puts it rather emphatically,

> I made myself a rule, that I will describe the doctrine of each sect in accordance with the manner I found it in their books without any favoritism to them on my part, and without any bias against them. [This will be done] without [any attempt] to distinguish what is sound in it from what is corrupt [or] to distinguish the truthful in it from the false. However, the flashes of truth and the odor of falsehood will become manifest to the intelligent minds in the realms of rational proofs.[1]

The significance of the last sentence is twofold. First, it establishes, for the modern student of religion, the principle that the historian of religions must not involve himself in matters of value-judgments lest he invalidate his claim of objectivity. Although al Shahrastānī permits himself to make no value-judgments, he does not deny that others, who are interested in the question of truth and value-judgment, may do so. But the researcher must be strictly objective in his description and analysis of religion, leaving aside all matters of judgment.

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[1]p. 5.

Modern students of religions are divided in their attitude towards the problem of value-judgment. Philip H. Ashby expresses this situation by stating,

> The history of religions, despite its ambition to be known as a science, has not been able to divest itself of a subjective element that appears to qualify, if not thwart, its claim to be a discipline descriptive in nature and objective in intent. Like the field of history, its role and purpose places it (perhaps with some inner discontent) within the humanities from which it seeks to venture forth into the fields of the social sciences, only to discover that its search for value and for truth demands that it bifurcate itself if it is to fulfill its raison d'être.[1]

Al Fārūqī considers the history of religions to be an autonomous discipline only when it includes judgment as part of its study. In this regard, he states:

> The first two steps of history of religions (collection of data and construction of meaning-wholes) . . . justify the specialized disciplines of Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist studies, and so forth; but not the history of religions as an autonomous discipline. For this, a third branch of study is necessary, viz., judgment or evaluation . . . the significance of the whole discipline of history of religions will stand or fall with the establishment or repudiation of this third branch.[2]

Again, he emphasizes, "As academician, the historian of religions is above all concerned with the truth."[3]

Secondly, al Shahrastānī's statement implies that those who wish to make value-judgments will have to do so in accordance with a method

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[1]Philip H. Ashby, "The History of Religions," in Religion, ed. Paul Ramsey, p. 13.

[2]Al Fārūqī, "The History of Religions: Its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim-Christian Dialogue," in Numen, pp. 48-49.

[3]Ibid., p. 49.

which is critically and rationally sound. In other words, their judgment must be based on a scientific foundation; otherwise, its validity may be questioned. In this manner, al Shahrastānī avoids making judgments himself, yet at the same time leaves the possibility open for those who are concerned with such questions. The same statement suggests that a value-judgment might be made and that truth could be established on logical and rational principles. We may compare his position to that of the phenomenologists whom Ashby describes:

> Some phenomenologists have placed their emphasis upon the descriptive pursuit; and they prefer to leave the problem of the value of the phenomenon or of the collective group of phenomena to the philosopher of religion, or, occasionally, to the theologian. . . . They do not mean . . . that qualitative analysis and evaluation have no place in the study of religion; they do hold, however, that it must be separated from the phenomenological pursuit itself.[1]

a. The Scientific Basis of Value-Judgments

Al Shahrastānī pointed out that among the numerous sects of each of the world's religions, only one sect can be considered as the true sect. Although he does not use the term "true," his expression "the saved sect" (al firqah al nājiyah)[2] distinguishes one group as the one which is in possession of truth. This designation is not assigned *a priori* to single out one sect from the rest. It is rather the result of a scientific logical deduction used to decide questions of a theoretical nature such as those of value judgment and truth. Al Shahrastānī's argument for the possible existence of a true sect is based on

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[1]Ashby, p. 27.

[2]p. 3.

the following logical formulation:

> In two contradictory cases, the truth is [always] in one. It is impossible to have two contradictory and opposite cases in accordance with the laws of contradiction unless truth and falsity are divided between them, so that truth will be in one of them and not in the other. It is also impossible to judge that two men holding opposite views regarding questions of the principle of the rational things, are both true and right, because if truth is one in any rational problem, then truth in all problems has to be the possession of one group.[1]

Also, to make sure that this is not his own judgment of rational problems, al Shahrastānī ascribes such a judgment to tradition as he states: "we came to know about this through tradition (samᶜ)."[2]

This principle of judgment as based on "rational proofs" (dalā'il ᶜaqliyyah) is elaborated by al Shahrastānī later in his book. According to him, "the majority of Ahl al 'Usūl agree that the researcher in the problems of 'usūl and in the rational, certain and clear-cut principles, must be decisive about value-judgment, because in such issues, the right judgment is with one person. It is impossible that two persons disagree about a rational judgment, a real disagreement negatively or positively in accordance with the above mentioned conditions of contradiction, so that one denies the very same thing which the other affirms, seeing it from the same point of view, unless they divide right

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[1]p. 3. Part of this quotation is rendered by al Fārūqī as follows: "Only one of all the beliefs and views held by these sects may claim to be true. For no two sects share a point and contradict each other thereon but that one must be right and the other wrong, or both wrong. To declare both judgments true would be to deny the unity of truth. Therefore, since truth is one, only that sect which acknowledges it and holds the beliefs which accord therewith may be said to be truly saved." See The Great Asian Religions, p. 326.

[2]p. 3.

and error, truth and falsity between them."[1] This rule is given a universal application by al Shahrastānī as follows: "[This is true] whether the disagreement is among the people of 'uṣūl in Islām or among the people of religions and opinions other than the Islamic religion. [This is] because the object of the dispute cannot be both truth and falsity, rightness and error in the same case."[2]

Al Shahrastānī bases this rational foundation for judgment on the same hermeneutical principle which he used before as a basis for the comparative method. To make a decision as to what is true and what is false, there must be agreement on the nature of the subject of disagreement. This nature must be defined in a manner accepted by both opponents and then subjected to their evaluation, positively or negatively. Al Shahrastānī expresses this through an example. "Sometimes two people disagree on an issue, and the object of their dispute can have different meanings, so that the exact nature of the opposition between the two sides is confused. In such a case, it may be that both disputants are in the right, and the conflict between them arose simply because each gave the problem a different meaning."[3] Al

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[1]pp. 155-156.

[2]p. 156. An example is given as follows: ". . . someone may state that Zayd is in the house at this hour and another may state that Zayd is not in the house at this hour. We will definitely know that one of the two tellers is true and the other is false because the person they speak of cannot combine the two conditions together in him, so that Zayd will be in the house and not in the house at the same time. p. 156.

[3]p. 156. The problem of speech (kalām) and that of vision (ru'yah) are the examples used by al Shahrastānī to illustrate this point. According to him, those who disagree on the issue of speech do not base their disagreement on a single meaning which they respectively deny or

Shahrastānī insists that judgments cannot be made unless the meanings of concepts are defined in a manner accepted by both parties to the conflict. Giving his example of the "beatific vision" (ru'yah), he states very emphatically: "They must agree first on what it is and then speak of [it] either negatively or positively."[1] The same stress is repeated with the question of speech (kalām): "They must come back to establish what is the essence of speech, and then speak of [it] negatively or positively; otherwise both positions may be right,"[2] for the necessary precondition for judgment is lacking.

Another important principle for the evaluation of truth concerns the distinction between what is called takfīr, judging someone to be a non-believer, and taṣwīb, a judgment of truth in terms of right and wrong. The distinction here made by al Shahrastānī is based on the distinction between 'uṣūl and furū^c, the "roots" and the "branches." As we have defined them earlier, 'uṣūl have to do with problems of "knowledge" while furū^c are concerned with problems of "jurisprudence."

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accept: "He who claimed that [speech] is created meant by it that speech is the letters and sounds in the tongue and the punctuation, and words in writing, and accordingly he claimed that speech is created. And he who claimed that it is not created did not mean by it the letters and the writing but meant some other meaning. And thus, the conflict over the issue of creation did not result from one meaning [of speech]. This is true of the question of vision. He who denied it claimed that vision is a connection between the rays and the object of seeing, and as such it does not apply to [God] and he who accepted it claimed that vision is perception ('idrāk) or a special science and as such it can be attributed to [God]. Accordingly, the denial and the acceptance did not take place in regard to one meaning." p. 156.

[1]p. 156.

[2]pp. 156-157.

Al Shahrastānī holds that there are two kinds of judgments, each proper only for one division and not for the other. The 'uṣūl deal with any problem in which truth has to be found between two conflicting opponents.[1] Again, 'uṣūl include "whatever is rational and can be reached through speculation and rational proofs."[2] Thus judgment in this regard evaluates the truth or falsehood of each position; there is no question of takfīr, judging the opponent as a non-believer.

Al Shahrastānī's objective, it seems, is to establish a norm on which evaluations of other religions and philosophies can be based. This is done in order to avoid the practice of the Orthodox sect in any religion of condemning all the other sects as "disbelief" (kufr). Al Shahrastānī divided religion into "knowledge" and "obedience,"[3] one 'aṣl and the other far^c, and so there is a kind of duality in the way we look at the question of truth. As a problem of knowledge, any concept is to be judged as either right or wrong depending on the given rational proofs. However, as a question of obedience, a concept can be judged as pertaining to faith, and thus to judge someone as a non-believer only becomes relevant in that part of religion for which obedience is essential, such as most questions of jurisprudence.

In this regard, al Shahrastānī quotes Abū al Ḥasan al ^cAnbary to the effect that every mujtahid (researcher) in the problems of 'uṣūl is right. The justification given for this dictum is that every problem

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[1]p. 28.

[2]p. 28.

[3]p. 28.

of knowledge, proven negatively or positively, has some aspect of truth because the mujtahid has spared no pains in speculating about the problem; whether his conclusions are positive or negative, he must have perceived some aspect of truth.[1] Al ᶜAnbary limits this rule of judgment to the Islamic sects, and one can see that al Shahrastānī is inclined to extend this rule to include all forms of beliefs and religions. He says,

> As for the non-Islamic [religions and sects], the [Islamic] texts and the [Islamic] consensus ('ijmāᶜ) have agreed on their disbelief and sinning. However, if we pursue [al ᶜAnbary's] teaching [to its logical conclusion], we must judge every researcher as having hit upon [some aspect of] the truth. But the [Islamic] texts and the consensus prevented [al ᶜAnbary] from judging as right every researcher and from approving of every one who gives an opinion.[2]

This kind of implicit criticism is developed in al Shahrastānī's attempt to show the confusion which resulted from the inconsistent use of a principle of evaluation, applying it to some beliefs and denying it to others. This inconsistency appears in "the disagreements among scholars of 'uṣūl on [the problem of] judging the people of opinions as non-believers despite their clear decision that every mujtahid is right."[3] Despite the agreement that "to judge someone as a non-believer is a legal decision,"[4] the scholars of 'uṣūl differ in the manner they apply this principle. According to al Shahrastānī, among them there is "the extravagant one, and he who is biased in favor

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[1]p. 157.

[2]p. 157.

[3]p. 157.

[4]p. 157.

of his own doctrine,"[1] who "judged his opponent as a non-believer and as being led astray."[2] Then there is "the tolerant and friendly one,"[3] who did not judge his opponent as a non-believer.[4] The first draws a similarity between the doctrine he condemns and one of the doctrines of the "people of opinions and religions." The Qadariyyah, for example, are likened to the Magians, the anthropomorphists to the Jews and the Rāfiḍah to the Christians."[5] Biased scholars of 'uṣūl applied to co-religionist opponents the same legal principles applied to Magians, Jews and Christians, whereas the tolerant scholars did not condemn their opponents but only considered them as led astray.[6]

In all this, one can see that al Shahrastānī is implicitly critical of such an inconsistency in the attitudes of the scholars of 'uṣūl. He sees a deviation from an established principle of judgment when they confuse problems of knowledge with problems of jurisprudence. Seeing problems of knowledge in terms of the taṣwīb-takfīr distinction would allow some aspect of truth to be ascribed to all knowledge. This would open the door for a much more tolerant treatment of other religions and opinions to replace the utter condemnation advocated by some of the scholars of 'uṣūl. Al Shahrastānī's call is for an objective

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[1]p. 157.

[2]p. 157.

[3]p. 157.

[4]p. 157.

[5]p. 157.

[6]p. 157.

treatment of other religions and sects viewed mainly as a body of knowledge subject to rational analysis; this must be the basis for their evaluation. From the preceding analysis we can see that the evaluation will end positively, because every problem of knowledge, whether viewed in positive or negative terms, has a claim to truth and is right at least from some aspects. This understanding of the nature of truth in religious knowledge is revolutionary and marks a point of departure in that it provides a legitimate place for all religions and sects in the religious tradition of mankind.

As a question of knowledge, the truth problem can be also resolved phenomenologically. By this we do not refer to the phenomenological epôché and suspension of truth itself. This will imply contradiction in terms. We rather mean to indicate the application of a phenomenological reduction through which truth can be measured, not judged. Al Shahrastānī's two hermeneutical principles, ghuluww and taqṣīr, are very helpful here. A central position between ghuluww and taqṣīr can be deduced through a phenomenological reduction of the two extreme notions. As we explained earlier, ghuluww and taqṣīr are two states of mind. Applied to religious phenomena, they show that the interpreter of the phenomenon in question has missed the right understanding of the phenomenon either by excess of interpretation or by inadequacy. In interpreting any phenomenon, it is the subject's mind which is involved. Interpretation is but a state of mind, and as such, it can hit truth or miss it. This is what al Shahrastānī meant by ghuluww and taqṣīr, excess or inadequacy of interpretation. For him, they function as measures of interpretation.

To overcome the dilemma caused by this situation, a reduction of ghuluww and taqṣīr must be performed. As two representations of the human mind of the given phenomenon, they must be subjected to a phenomenological reduction which brings them back to reality. Each is subjected to a reduction towards the center which achieves a moderate position, returning to the original condition of the phenomenon before the human mind produced its representations. (See diagram on page 253) The reduction, as we explained earlier, is performed by the human mind and the representation produced after the reduction is also a state of mind. But here, it is the moderate (pure) mind that reaches a position between ghuluww and taqṣīr. Although al Shahrastānī does not use a term which indicates this position, we may use the term Wasaṭ (center) which refers to a central position between ghuluww and taqṣīr (see p. 253). In the language of modern phenomenology, "pure consciousness" might represent such a state of mind.

b. General Features of Objectivity

In addition to these general principles of evaluation and the formulation of a hermeneutical basis for value-judgment, other features of objectivity may be deduced from al Shahrastānī's work. He frequently emphasized his dependence on what he found in the books and scriptures of each religion and sect, without any alteration and in accordance with the terminologies used by each of them to express its own belief. Describing the Indian sects, he states, "we will describe their doctrine, according to the manner we found them in their celebrated

books."[1] His description is the result of knowledge of the patterns of expression associated with each religion, and also the deep insight into the specific modes of thought by which each religion is distinguished. Al Shahrastānī, thus, states,

> [These are] the doctrines of the people of the world, those who have religions and sects, and the people of opinions and [their] schools, from among the Islamic and non-Islamic sects. . . . We will report those who profess them, and their founders, describing their origins and sources from the books of each sect in accordance with its own terminology after a deep study of its methods and a keen investigation into its beginnings and ends.[2]

In documenting his description, al Shahrastānī quotes only the well-known scholars and authorities. In some cases, he decides to omit the mention of certain views, because they are recorded by authors whose reliability he suspects.[3] In other cases, al Shahrastānī depends on witnesses who are followers of the sects he studied and who are known for their sound knowledge of the sectarian beliefs. In a case where this is not possible, al Shahrastānī resorts to converts to Islām to ask their opinions of issues concerning their previous religions. For instance, he inquires about some of the teachings of the Magians by consulting a Muslim who was originally a Magian.[4] In situations where a reliable explanation is not available, al Shahrastānī acknowledges this shortcoming and frees himself of the responsibility of reporting something erroneous or doubtful by using the classical Islamic

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[1]p. 444.

[2]p. 24.

[3]p. 80.

[4]p. 188.

expression Allah-u-a^c^lam, "God knows best."[1] In concluding his work, he asks his readers to correct whatever errors they find in his description. Accordingly, he states: "This is what I found from the doctrines of the people of the world; I described it in the manner I found it. And so, whoever discovers in it a discrepancy in description and improves it, God, blessed and glorified, will improve for him his condition and straighten his sayings and actions."[2]

With these principles in mind, then, we can expect al Shahrastānī to make a value-judgment only in one of the following situations. He may pass judgment when a clear contradiction is found in a certain concept which hinders its understanding, as for example with the opinion of the Za^c^frāniyyah sect regarding the problem of the creation of the Qur'ān. Discovering a clear contradiction in their opinion, al Shahrastānī comments only by stating that "maybe they meant by that its contrary. Otherwise, the contradiction is clear."[3] Another example of "clear contradiction" concerns the dualistic concept of the Magians.[4] He uses the judgments of the historians of a certain religion or sect regarding the authenticity of historical events concerning their belief.[5] Al Shahrastānī also evaluates a concept when it is not based upon scientific knowledge. This, however, does not

[1] p. 192.

[2] p. 458.

[3] p. 62.

[4] p. 182.

[5] p. 182.

mean a rejection of this concept as a religious fact.[1] Some other concepts are interpreted as symbols.[2]

Most of these evaluations are in cases where understanding a certain religious fact is difficult because of some contradiction, obscurity or confusion in the way it is presented. Al Shahrastānī's evaluations all deal with the need for clarification so that his description of these notions will not be limited by his inability to understand them. This is why in some of these cases he tries to think of a reason for the occurrence of such a notion, knowing that his speculations cannot be based on fact. These are made in order to justify the existence of such phenomena, not in order to judge their value.

Al Shahrastānī's position on value-judgment is no doubt influenced by the scientific spirit which colored his work. His objective and scientific preoccupation with matters of classification, and the structural system which he established, all urged him to find a non-theological answer for value-judgment. In this, he reminds us of the impact which the scientific method of the social sciences has exercised upon the historian of religions' approach to questions of value-judgment. H.G. Hubbeling describes this principle in the following terms:

> The science of religion . . . includes a study of religion as such. This study ought to be done in as neutral a way as possible, in that the student gives an objective and impartial description and explanation of the religious phenomena. Neither does he give a moral or other evaluation of these phenomena, nor does he inquire into the truth of them. He does not show his own religious or atheistic preferences and by no means does he try to defend them within the scope of his

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[1]pp. 187, 449.

[2]p. 184.

> discipline, the science of religion. Of course, the student of religion has his own right to a personal religious or atheistic conviction and he has, of course, the right to defend it. But by doing so he transcends the limits of his discipline, the science of religion, and he enters into another discipline. Science of religion as such is neutral, objective and impartial.[1]

This is the only advantage which the science of religion has over theological and philosophical disciplines. These disciplines claim for themselves a scientific method but as Hubbeling explained, they "can best be described as science of religion plus the study of the truth and value of the various religious statements."[2] The philosopher evaluates on the basis of rational judgment while the theologian does so with reference to some dogma or doctrine.

To avoid value-judgments in the field of religion, certain measures were developed by historians of religions. The most important of these is the _epôché_ of the phenomenologically oriented historians of religions. Its purpose is to suspend all judgments as Bleeker explains: "Applied to phenomenology of religion, this means that this science cannot concern itself with the question of the truth of religion. Phenomenology must begin by accepting as proper objects of study all phenomena that are professed to be religious."[3] Such an attitude has always been recommended by social scientists. Berger, for example, writes: "The scientific study of religion must bracket the ultimate

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[1]H.G. Hubbeling, "Theology, Philosophy and Science of Religion and Their Logical and Empirical Presuppositions," in _Religion, Culture and Methodology_, ed. Th. P. Van Baaren and H.J.W. Drijvers (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), pp. 9-10.

[2]_Ibid._, p. 10.

[3]C.J. Bleeker, "The Relation of the History of Religions to Kindred Religious Sciences," in _Numen_, Vol. I, Fasc. II (1954), p. 148.

truth claims implied by its subject. This is so regardless of one's particular conceptions as to scientific methodology -- for example, as between 'positivistic' or 'humanistic' conceptions of science."[1] Berger went farther than this, and called for "methodological atheism":

> I firmly believe in the epistemologically neutral character of this enterprise. It has been correctly said that the scientific study of religion must exhibit a "methodological atheism." The adjective "methodological," though, should be underlined. The scientific study of religion cannot base itself on any affirmation of the ultimate truth claims of religion. But it must no more constitute itself on the basis of atheism (that is, atheism *tout court* as against the aforementioned "methodological atheism").[2]

In their application of the epôché, historians of religions have expressed different attitudes and produced different results. Some did not apply it as rigorously as they should, even some of those who developed the concept theoretically, such as Van der Leeuw and Wach. Of Van der Leeuw, Geo Widengren says, "Van der Leeuw was the first to formulate two principles of great value to phenomenological research -- though he has not always been true to his own principles . . . because he allows his scientific work to be dominated by his strong Christian feelings."[3] Van Baaren also criticizes Van der Leeuw's use of the epôché. Moreover, he thinks that because the problem of truth cannot be resolved scientifically, the study of religion should altogether

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[1]Peter L. Berger, "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 1974), p. 125.

[2]Ibid., p. 133.

[3]Geo Widengren, "Some Remarks on the Methods of the Phenomenology of Religion," in Ways of Understanding Religion, ed. Walter H. Capps (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1972), p. 143.

avoid it; he would criticize any use of the _epôché_, the suspension of judgment, because it always implies that in the end a judgment will be given:

> Van der Leeuw uses this term (_epôché_) to indicate a modest suspension of judgment. The scientific validity of theological statements is kept fully intact, it is only for the time being put in brackets (eingeklammert). The point of view defended here is not that theological pronouncements concerning the truth or untruth of a religion should be put between brackets for the time being, but that they should be crossed out definitively from the language of science of religion as irrelevant.[1]

In his critique, Van Baaren calls for the establishment of a "systematic science of religion." In contrast to the history of religions, Van Baaren's science is no historical discipline; "it is a systematic one."[2] He distinguishes it from other systematic disciplines by its "lack of a normative character." He identifies its task as to study religions "as they are empirically and [disclaim] any statements concerning the value and truth of the phenomenon studied."[3] Different from phenomenology of religion, the "systematic science of religion must not divorce religious phenomena from their cultural milieu."[4]

It is important to observe that Van Baaren separates the problem of truth of religion from that of value-judgment. While he denies the possibility of the first for the scientific study of religion, he thinks

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[1]Th. P. Van Baaren, "Science of Religion as a Systematic Discipline: Some Introductory Remarks," _Religion, Culture and Methodology_, ed. Th. P. Van Baaren and H.J.W. Drijvers (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 48.

[2]_Ibid._, p. 47.

[3]_Ibid._, p. 47.

[4]_Ibid._, p. 50.

that value-judgments may be made if they are "based on norms acknowledged by the religion judged. Value-judgments derived from other religions than the religion judged are not applicable."[1] In this, he agrees with Kristensen who, in his criticism of Otto's idea of the holy, has declared:

> The believer finds the validation of his faith in quite a different realm. This validation comes, not in the comparative approach in which one's own religion is thought to be the purified form of the religious heritage of mankind, but in the actual practice of religious life. Any believer will say that he owes the certainty of his faith to God. That is the religious reality. . . . We should not take the concept "holiness" as our starting point, asking, for example, how the numinous is revealed in natural phenomena. On the contrary, we should ask how the believer conceives the phenomena he calls "holy."[2]

While the normative nature of the discipline requires some concern for problems of evaluation and even for truth, there has been no serious and fruitful work in this area. Even the suggestion that evaluation in the history of religions should proceed from within the discipline and from within the religion being judged has not been developed, because no theoretical or methodological discussions have shown how it can be done. W.C. Smith, Kristensen and Van Baaren among others have made valuable suggestions but have not formulated a theory with clear methods.

As an answer for the normative question, al Shahrastānī allows value-judgments to be made but only on the basis of a scientific method. Truth can be decided rationally and on logical procedure or

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[1]Van Baaren, p. 48.

[2]W. Brede Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion, introd. Hendrik Kraemer (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3d printing 1971), p. 17.

phenomenologically. Despite this al Shahrastānī himself did not involve himself in determining such issues; he simply established the rules of scientific evaluation as based solely on the data of religion. His understanding of the task of the study of religion, as a systematic task through which an accurate description of the phenomena can be provided, limited the importance of value-judgments. It left evaluation as an optional procedure which, if underaken, must be performed scientifically and in accordance with the conditions of the religion under investigation. Among modern students of religion, Van Baaren comes closest to al Shahrastānī's position. Both men are concerned with the systematic science of religion. Although Van Baaren thinks that truth cannot be determined scientifically, a position which al Shahrastānī considers possible, he nevertheless thinks that value-judgments can be made. Like al Shahrastānī, he bases value-judgment "on norms acknowledged by the religion judged. Value-judgments derived from other religions than the religion judged are not applicable."[1] Al Shahrastānī refrained from passing theological judgment on other beliefs not because it is not possible but rather because it contradicts the nature of scientific investigation. Knowledge of the sciences, including the science of religions, should be neutral insofar as every research in knowledge must result in some truth which would be difficult to invalidate. This might agree with Berger's notion of an epistemologically neutral character of the study of religions. In terms of the social function of religions, al Shahrastānī's system may imply

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[1]Van Baaren, p. 48.

a judgment; the less function a religion acquires, the less prestige it has in his system. However, the emphasis on the social function of religion is made in order to distinguish the religious from the non-religious. As such, it cannot be considered as wholly an evaluational principle, at least not between religions.

CONCLUSION

The theory of religion developed by al Shahrastānī focuses on the notions of obedience (ṭā^cah) and the consequent necessity to follow a kind of leadership (inqiyād). Religion, unlike free philosophical thought, demands the individual's total submission to the call of a certain founder (Wāḍi^c) of a belief system. Within this system, the individual is able to keep his individuality (tamānu^c) and at the same time cooperate with the group (ta^cāwun) in order to fulfill the needs which he alone cannot realize for himself. Obedience is, thus, the root of order and organization. It is the means of achieving an ordered relation between the individual and the group. The survival of both depends upon obedience to the laws and injunctions established by the founder. Ijtimā^c (socialization) is based on niẓām (system) and cannot function without it. Ṭā^cah to this system is imperative.

In the final analysis, the creation of a religious group (millah) fulfills a social need on the part of man; the necessity to preserve his life on earth. It is also linked to an ultimate objective: to prepare himself for a final judgment in a hereafter. By belonging to a certain religious group, the individual identifies himself with a way of life (manhāj) based on a certain body of laws (sharī^cah) and customs (sunna). The group and the way of life, based on these laws and customs, are practically inconceivable without a charismatic figure, the founder (wāḍi^c) who functions both as law-giver (shāri^c) and organizer of the group.

This social function of religion is the main distinction between religion and other forms of belief. In other words, a belief cannot be called a dīn, "religion," unless it has a function to fulfill in man's life. Through knowledge of the teachings of the founder (including the laws and customs) and their implementation in practical life, the individual is rightly called "religious" (mutadayyin). Religion is, therefore, constituted of three main principles: knowledge (ma^{c}rifah), obedience (ṭā^{c}ah), and fellowship (inqiyād). Knowledge includes the theoretical aspect of religion (its intellectual and ideological dimensions). Obedience represents the practical dimension, the application of the theoretical content of religion. This practical dimension includes rituals and all questions of jurisprudence. Fellowship is to fulfill the requirements of obedience, together with others, under the leadership of a founder.

The founder of a new system of belief usually faces certain opposition to his teachings, in the form of protest (i^{c}tirāḍ) against the founder and his system. This protest, consisting of differences from the founder's ideology, develops during his life and continues after his death and finally creates separate entities known as sects (firaq). The rise of these sects involves, beside the theological factor, political, social, economic and philosophical elements; all derive from the historical circumstances of each religion. For this reason, a total explanation of the phenomenon of sects must consider all elements and base itself on distinctions that are not totally theological. The rise of sects is but a natural development out of many different factors. As such, sects are repeated patterns in history and in

most cases, they do not separate themselves from society or challenge the established order. Rather, they work from inside it. Alongside each religion develops a number of sects whose diversity stems from the different causes which led to their emergence.

The multiplicity of religions and sects that branch from them necessitates the establishment of a certain classificatory system based on categories that are scientifically sound. The system of classification relates the religions to the general thought of mankind. A series of classifications proceeds scientifically from the most general to the most specific, starting with a classification of the peoples of the world and ending with a classification of religions on the basis of scriptural revelation. The series of classifications is patterned in a manner which clarifies the relation of each to the other. As is indicated (diagram, p.300), what constitutes the end in each classification constitutes the beginning for the next classification. Thus the classification of doctrines of the peoples of the world leads logically to a classification of philosophies and religions, and this leads directly to a third classification of religions as isolated from philosophies. The second and third classifications show the evolution of human thought from mere philosophical opinions to developed religious systems with distinct ways of life.

The implicit relation between religions and sects, and between the sects themselves, requires that the classification must deal with them as whole structures, in which each of the constituting elements can be seen both as an independent structure by itself and at the same time as one structure within a whole-structure. This provides a way of

both comparing and contrasting each of the religions and the sects. This structural system must be dynamic and elastic enough to allow the inclusion of new elements without disrupting the entire structure. Besides its scientific foundations, the system of classification also provides a highly conceptual frame of reference by recognizing the central features by which various religions and sects are differentiated. It also considers the historical quality of religions and sects by describing their different historical figures.

The purpose of classification is order. It renders religions, sects and religious phenomena in general intelligible through systematization. A scientific classification reduces the multiple number of phenomena to essential structures. The number of sects, for example, is brought under control and understood as a system. This system is based on a scientific method which identifies each sect in its integrity and in its relation to other sects. When the relationships are analyzed, patterns or types of sects emerge as constituting a specific group which can be related to other groups. The categories of differentiation (qawāᶜid al Khilāf) function as the controlling principle(s) (ḍābiṭ) which relate sects to each other and make groups out of their multiplicity. When these groups of sects are contrasted with each other both their unique and their common features will become obvious. The unique features are those characteristic of each group of sects. The common features are shared with other groups. This also applies to individual sects.

Al Shahrastānī's scientific classification defines each sect as both a structure and a sub-structure. It is a structure when viewed

as an entity by itself; it is a sub-structure when it is related to a larger structure. Thus, each sect is a structure and gives structure to another. As such, the totality of sects acquires a system. They are no more the unrelated entities presented in works before al Shahrastānī. This structural system is preserved through the interplay of its constituting elements. The sects as they appear within the system are dynamic; they interact with other sects because they derive from other sects and affect still others. In classifications before al Shahrastānī, the relationships between the sects are not explained, but in al Shahrastānī's system, the sects explain each other and each sect is a functioning element in the structure. Even opposite sects, sects known for their extreme opposite doctrines, can be grouped together. They are considered identical in being opposites.

Some general guiding principles may be deduced from al Shahrastānī's structural study of religions and sects:

1. The "categories of differentiation" will vary from one group of religions to another and from one group of sects to another, according to the specific nature and conceptual framework of these religions and sects. Universal categories of differentiation might, however, also be developed.
2. The "categories of differentiation" represent typical patterns that are to be found in the majority of religions and sects and through which these may be compared and differentiated.
3. The "categories of differentiation" are purely religious factors, i.e., they stem from the religious experience and the essential nature of the religion or sect. Thus the analysis of religious

phenomena does not reduce them to external factors, social, cultural, psychological; or to foreign elements from other religions.

4. The "categories of differentiation" coupled with the concept of the "founder" together provide structural and historical foundations for the study of religions and sects. The two approaches seek an understanding of the essence of religion and its history as two central and related issues in the study of the history of religions.
5. The problems of classification and the structural make-up of religions and sects are issues which can be scientifically established. The structures provide connections and meanings that are by-products of the scientific method. The religious whole that is reached through structures and sub-structures is rooted in scientific certainty.
6. Religious personalities are significant for classification, and for historical reasons. Through them, an understanding of religious experience, and a historical consciousness of religion, are provided. Founders are of especially great significance for classification. A sociological concern is also revealed in the study of the role of leadership and charisma.
7. Through structural classifications, not only a comparative study of religions and sects, but also a comparative study of philosophy becomes possible.
8. The description and understanding of religions and sects must make no value-judgments. However, those among students of religion who are interested in questions of truth must base their evaluations on rational and scientific foundations. Evaluations can be also made

on the basis of a phenomenological reduction of differing representations as reflecting different states of mind. The purpose of reduction is to reach a central position which represents the original condition of phenomena.

CONCLUSION

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From the previous analysis of the methodologies of Saadia al Fayyūmī and Muḥammad al Shahrastānī, it is obvious that the two authors along with other medieval scholars of religion viewed the study of religion as essentially a problem of knowledge and its investigation. Therefore, they had to provide an understanding of religion based on systematic classification of religious data and an analysis of the meanings of religious phenomena.

To provide a valid understanding of Judaism, Saadia had to investigate the general process of cognition and establish knowledge on a rational foundation based on clarity of mind. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to suspend all knowledge, whether grounded in revelation or not, in order to establish its validity on the basis of his analysis of both the subject and object of knowledge. As we explained earlier, his goal was to reach with the subject a state of pure soul (consciousness) through reduction of all man's powers to the power of cognition, and to reach the most abstract form of the object.

From this theoretical framework Saadia tries to establish the validity of religious knowledge. Like all other forms of knowledge, religious knowledge must be founded on a rational basis which is empirically verifiable. Thus, Saadia bases religious knowledge on observation, which is the essential source of all knowledge identified with wisdom including the knowledge of all the sciences and its method

of study. In Wisdom, there is a unity of method and content. Its objective is the knowledge of things as they are. Thus belief and disbelief are two mental states regarding something known. The first is a result of a complete process of cognition and the second results from an inadequacy in cognition which fails to render to our consciousness reality as it is.

Despite its unity with other forms of knowledge, the knowledge of religion requires a special system of hermeneutics. For Saadia religion is best understood as a tradition, and as such it demands a multifarious process of interpretation to explain the many aspects and manifestations of religious phenomena. Part of the hermeneutical system is to be able to relive the historical past and transmit modes of thought of earlier generations of religious men and their experiences. Thus tradition, history and experience all assist in explaining the meaning of religious expressions. They help transform religious data from abstract notions into experienced phenomena rooted in historical consciousness.

The treatment of religion as an aspect of knowledge demanded from al Shahrastānī a classification of religious data as the first requirement of understanding. The purpose of classification is order. It renders religions, sects and religious phenomena in general intelligible through systematization. A scientific classification reduces the multiple number of phenomena to essential structures which indicate both what is common and what is unique among phenomena. Al Shahrastānī's analysis dealt also with the question of the definition of religion and resolved the problem in accordance with the function of

religion in societal organization. In sociological terms al Shahrastānī analyzed the nature of religious grouping and its social function. He defined the nature of religious experience and the stages of religious commitment. He also provided an analysis of the phenomenon of sects, their emergence and their relation to orthodoxy.

Underlying the methodologies of Saadia and al Shahrastānī, as well as other medieval scholars of religion, was the strong conviction of the essential unity of human knowledge as derived from the unity of reality. Truth is one and hence knowledge also must be one. This was the basis of medieval methodology. For the medieval researcher this implied that the method of the study of knowledge must be united regardless of the subject matter of research. Since reality is one, only one description of it may be given, no matter what approach is taken by the researcher.

Applying this principle to the study of religion, the medieval scholars of religion concluded that only one correct description of religion is possible. Contradictory descriptions of the same phenomenon are caused by false reports about the phenomenon.

A description is to be judged as true or false insofar as it reflects the real character of the described object. Wisdom is the understanding of things as they are, not as someone would like them to be. The belief that opinions proceed from things and not things from opinions exemplifies Saadia's view of the objectivity that should prevail in religious research. True and false opinions are two representations of reality; as such, they are cognitive perceptions influenced by the rational and irrational powers of the soul. Clarity of

consciousness must be the basis for a description of things as they are. Al Birūnī analyzed the personality of reporters and the factors which control their cognitive powers and influence their descriptions of religions. False descriptions are nothing but lies about the thing described. Empirical descriptions based on "eye-witness" in which the "eye of the observer apprehends the substance of that which is observed" cannot but be true. However, their truth or falsity depends primarily upon the "character of reporters," who are influenced by many external factors. To tell the truth about something is a matter of "justice" and "moral" responsibility. Ibn Kammūna called for a "removal of condemnations" from world religions which, in the language of al Birūnī, would mean a purification of the descriptions of religions from all forms of lies inserted by immoral reporters. Ibn Kammūna's expression <u>'izālat al tashnī^c</u> reveals the same ethical imperative emphasized by al Birūnī. Al Shahrastānī developed a scientific system for evaluation based on rational and logical principles.

All such attempts at evaluation and value judgments reflect no theological or philosophical assumptions whatsoever. The evaluations that are produced are not evaluations of religions as such, but of the <u>knowledge</u> of religions as presented by different studies in their day. Objectivity is not only a matter of scientific methodology, but also an ethical problem which demands absolute justice for the religion described. A false description is an unjust claim to present the reality about a religion.

Commitment to one's own belief need not hinder the accurate description of other systems of belief. To provide the essential facts

about foreign religions does not involve a conflict between the student's commitment to his religion and his commitment to the data described. Empirical research must be tested, not in accordance with one's own commitments, but on the basis of scientific criteria. Al Birūnī, for instance, insisted that objectivity results from the strict application of a scientific method coupled with a strong feeling of moral responsibility on the part of the researcher. To do otherwise is to "procure some superficial information which will satisfy neither the adherents of the doctrine in question nor those who really know it . . . [the researcher] will persist in litigous wrangling for his own original standing point."[1]

Religious commitment must enhance studies about other religions. It is part of the truth of one's own religion to tell the truth about others. Truth as such is a "divine command" and a matter of "moral courage." Subjective and objective truths are only two facets of the same truth and therefore should not contradict each other. While all medieval scholars of comparative religions had their own religious and theological positions, they were able to completely suspend these for the sake of true description. Grunebaum describes the works of some of those scholars in the following manner:

> Al Shahrastānī (d. 1153), and before him al Baghdādī (d. 1037) . . . are moved for the most part by the intrinsic interest of the subject. They have their own theological standpoints to defend, but they readily allowed themselves to succumb to the fascination of their theme, which they investigate with as much thoroughness as sympathy.[2]

If co-religionists were not pleased with descriptions of other beliefs,

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[1]Al Birūnī's India, p. 6.

[2]Grunebaum, Medieval Islam, p. 337.

al Birūnī's answer was that his work is "not polemical," but "a simple historic record of facts." In the case of his study of Hinduism, al Birūnī maintained that, if co-religionists are not pleased with the content of his record, all that can be said is "such is the belief of the Hindus, and that they themselves are best qualified to defend it." Ibn Kammūna's objectivity was so complete that his contemporaries were confused as to his personal religious commitment. A. Jeffery states that the interest of authors of medieval works on religions "is so frankly in the religions themselves that the authors tended to come under suspicion of not being very good Muslims."[1]

Just as medieval scholars were true to the description of individual religions other than their own, they also dealt with the larger problem of truth by endeavors to locate a core of truth common to all religions. This notion was again formulated in the light of their concept of the unity of reality and the unity of knowledge. For example, al Shahrastānī developed the idea that every researcher must hit upon truth in one way or the other. This implies that the multiplicity of religions is mankind's way of expressing the same reality. He established his categories of taṣwīb and takfīr: other religions were placed in the taṣwīb category, which admits they have a share in truth, and not within takfīr, which would have judged all religions except Islām as false.

Saadia's rationalism logically led to the conclusion that "the obligations purportedly demanded by God in different religious traditions can all be affirmed as divine will, all other factors being equal, simply because of the difference in the communities of persons with

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[1] Al Birūnī Commemoration Volume, p. 126.

whom God is relating."[1] As a result, other religions are considered to be objectively true:

> The truths of each of these religions are absolute, but the range of their application is limited to the members of the given religious community. . . . Jews as Jews, Moslems as Moslems, and Christians as Christians may affirm the objective truth of each other's religious commitments. Saadia did not draw such a consequence from his reflections about the authority of his tradition, but it would have been appropriate for him to do so.[2]

Ibn Kammūna not only described the monotheistic religions in a way which indicates that all three of them shared, in different ways, the same truth, but even his defense of idol-worship considers its truth objectively on its own terms. His final goal was to search for common denominators shared by all forms of beliefs. He was simply a believer in the truth of every religion he studied. In modern terms, we might say that he was a perfect example of a participant engagé.

Al Birūnī's interest lay in introducing the religions to each other's truth through the mediation of what he calls "scientific truth." Thus, in comparing Judaism and Christianity, he states that, in order

> . . . to point out scientific truth, to mediate between the two parties, and to clear up the differences between them, we have here set down the methods of each of the two sects according to their own opinion, as well as that of others, so as to show to each of them what is for and what is against the same. Then from our side we have shown that we frankly adopt their statement, and lean upon their opinion, in order to make the truth clear to them. In this we are guided by a desire that both parties should dismiss from their minds any suspicion that we are partial to either side or are dissembling that their minds should not shrink from our differing

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[1]Norbert Samuelson, "Saadia and the Logic of Religious Authority," Judaism, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1971), p. 465.

[2]Ibid., p. 466.

opinion.[1]

This wholehearted interest in scientific truth shows al Birūnī to be a believer in the universal heritage of mankind. As Arthur Upham Pope confirms, underlying his efforts was a strong protest against sectarianism and a strong belief in the "essential unity of [the major precepts of] all religions." This is based on his conviction of the "universal validity of reason" whose first assumption is that "knowledge is one."[2] According to Julius Guttmann, this conviction was held by a majority of medieval scholars of religion . He states that reason provided "the common foundation of the various religions," and based on reason, "medieval enlightenment [spoke] of a core of truth common to all religions."[3]

The medieval emphasis on the study of religion as an aspect of knowledge is relevant for the modern scene with its focus on epistemological issues as part of the general direction of Religionswissenschaft. The appreciation of such issues may bring about a significant change in the attitude of many historians of religions towards the medieval study of religion, which they rejected on superficial grounds, mistaking its epistemological character for normative metaphysics. We hope that such a change will provide a legitimate place for the medieval study of religion within the discipline of Religionswissenschaft.

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[1]Al Birūnī, Al 'Āthār al Bāqiyah ᶜan al Qurūn al Khāliyah, ed. Edward C. Sachau (Leipzig, 1878), p. 322.

[2]Al Birūnī Commemoration Volume, p. 283.

[3]Guttmann, Philosophies of Judaism, p. 71.

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